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Immortal longings



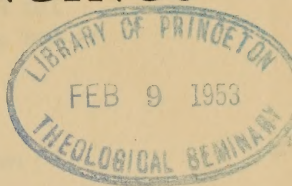




# IMMORTAL LONGINGS



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BY

G. T. BELLHOUSE, M.A., B.D.

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## Preface

TO ONE of Robert Louis Stevenson's detractors, who had complained that Stevenson wrote 'for effect', Chesterton retorted by asking, 'But what point is there in writing for anything else?' Certainly there would seem to be no other point in preaching. Hence it is little use trying to disguise the fact that the chapters of this book are all sermons, printed largely as they were preached, and preached 'for effect'.

But for what effect? Newman once answered this question by the title of a famous sermon: 'The motive of the preacher is—the salvation of the hearer.' And no answer could be more adequate, provided we interpret the word 'salvation' in a wide enough sense. Salvation—salvation from muddled thinking about God and His ways with men. Salvation from the tyranny of doubts and fears and moods. Salvation from bitterness, rebelliousness, self-pitying; from 'weak hands and feeble knees'; from every form of unkindness and discourtesy. Salvation into a life as positive, as complete, as strong, as gentle, as caring, as was that of Jesus Christ.

It is 'salvation' in this all-embracing sense which alone can be claimed as the thread which holds together this somewhat mixed bag of sermons.

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# I

## Immortal Longings

*Deep calleth unto deep.—Psalm 42<sup>7</sup>*

FEW IN recent years can have done more to commend Christianity to the thoughtful among his fellows than Mr. C. S. Lewis. By his books and his broadcasts he must have influenced hundreds. And undoubtedly part of his power lies in the fact that for a very long time he himself found it impossible to accept the Christian position, and if you had asked him why, he says he would have replied something like this:

‘Look at the universe we live in. By far the greatest part of it consists of empty space, completely dark and unimaginably cold. And Earth herself existed without life for millions of years and may exist for millions more when life has left her. And what is life while it lasts? It is so arranged that all the forms of it can live only by preying upon one another. The creatures cause pain by being born, and live by inflicting pain, and in pain they mostly die. Man’s history is largely a record of crime, war, disease, and terror. If you ask me to believe that this is the work of a benevolent and omnipotent spirit, I reply that all the evidence points in the opposite direction.’

So, he says, in his unbelieving days he used to argue. But now he realizes there was one question he forgot to ask, and that the most important question, and that question was this: ‘If the universe is so bad, or even half so bad,

how on earth did human beings ever come to attribute it to the activity of a wise and good Creator? Men are fools, perhaps; but hardly so foolish as that.'

Well, how is it? How is it that in spite of all that is so dark and bewildering, men have all through the ages come to believe in a good God, to build their altars and say their prayers?

Some people like the Communists have a ready answer. Religion with all its practices, they insist, has grown up simply as a way of escape. They say that the actual facts of life are so brutal that man has been unable to face them, and he has built up this imaginary world of religion that he may hide himself from them. Religion is just a smoke-screen thrown up to conceal the real facts, a chloroform mask into which the weak and unhappy stick their faces and try to forget.

But this explanation of the rise and hold of religion cannot bear a close examination. Religion has never been a way of escape from life for the greatest souls. It certainly wasn't for the greatest of them all, for Jesus. It led Him through Gethsemane and up a skull-shaped hill. It hasn't in our own day been a way of escape for Albert Schweitzer. It has led him to turn his back on all the delights of the musical and academic worlds and devote himself to the lowliest service of backward peoples. Religion certainly has brought comfort, but it has brought challenge as well. Its symbol has never been a cushion, but a cross. And men have gone on with it not always because they have *wanted* to, but because they have felt that they have *had* to, whether they wanted to or not. As with Jeremiah, it has been as a burning fire shut up in a man's bones. No, you cannot explain the rise of religion, the persistence of religion, the extraordinary fact that religious people speak much the same language in every age, by glibly talking about the desire to escape. How then can you explain it?

Is not the answer to be found in the four words of our text? All through the ages men have acknowledged God,



built their altars, said their prayers, because they have heard 'deep calling unto deep', the deep in the universe about them calling to the deep in their own souls. As Alfred Noyes has expressed it:

In the light of the silent stars that shine on the struggling  
sea,  
In the weary cry of the wind and the whisper of flower  
and tree,  
Under the breath of laughter, deep in the tide of tears,  
I hear the Loom of the Weaver that weaves the Web  
of Years.

Or as J. B. Priestley once wrote, men on this earth have always felt themselves moving through a haunted world, haunted by other presences, haunted by the deep things of God.

Admittedly, men, you and I, are not always conscious of deep calling unto deep. For months we may live on the mere surface of things and hear little but the sounds of the day. But we all do have moments when deep does call unto deep, when we seem to know the hills where our life rose and the sea where it goes, and afterwards we feel that these were our realest moments, the moments that have told us most about life.

Such moments sometimes come when we are alone with nature. Who of us cannot remember some evening among the hills or on the seashore when we have felt a Presence that disturbs us with the joy of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused? I remember at a Student Conference Dr. Selbie telling us how once he had been travelling to America on a ship where there was a miserable little specimen of a man who spent most of his time drinking at the bar. The evening before they reached New York there was an amazing sunset so that all gathered on deck to watch it, and after a little no one spoke. Deep was calling unto deep. Then the silence was disturbed by footsteps. It was the little drunkard coming up to see what was happening;

and when he saw he began to mutter, 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork'.

Such moments can also come when we are listening to music, to poetry, to great drama, when we are reading one of the masterpieces. Often the Brains Trust used to be asked why music has such power over us, why it can fill our eyes with tears, bring us to our knees. The answer surely is that throbbing through the greatest music we hear deep calling unto deep, and we feel exiled in this body of flesh and long for the eternal. And who that has seen *Antony and Cleopatra*, and heard Cleopatra about to die say:

Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have  
Immortal longings in me: Methinks I hear  
Antony call; I see him rouse himself  
To praise my noble act. Husband I come:  
I am fire and air; my other elements  
I give to baser life. So, have you done?  
Come then and take the last warmth of my lips.  
Farewell, kind Charmian; Iras, long farewell.

Who that has heard those words, 'Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have immortal longings in me', has not been haunted by them for days? And why? Because in their setting they start deep calling out to deep and we too have 'immortal longings'. So the Bible keeps its hold. As Coleridge put it, it finds us, and finds us at the greatest depths of our being.

Such moments also come when we meet with or listen to some truly spiritual man or woman. Once Baron von Hügel addressed a little conference gathered in the Tyrolese Alps, and one who was present wrote: 'He spoke to us words at once so simple and so burning that those who had the joy of hearing them have treasured them as a memory of one of those moments when life appears to us at once transfigured and yet real, when we are aware of those mysterious powers

which are part of us and yet are above and beyond us.' Note those last words, 'aware of those mysterious powers which are part of us and yet are above and beyond us'. Deep calling unto deep. And I remember once hearing Albert Schweitzer address a large audience in University College Hall in London. He spoke in German and I could follow little of it, but something of the man's intensity of spiritual life got across, and when the meeting was over I wanted to speak to no one. I wanted only to find a church where I could kneel and pray. Deep had called unto deep and brought one to one's knees. And surely here is the power of the really great preacher. It consists not just in what he says, but in his capacity, while saying it, to make the deep in the soul of the hearer cry out to the deep of the living God, a capacity, of course, which depends utterly on the depth of the preacher's own spiritual life.

And in the final analysis, is not this the ultimate reason why we call Jesus Lord and God? It's not so much because He was born of a virgin or performed miracles; but because as we watch Him move amongst men; as we hear Him say, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden', 'Let not your heart be troubled: in my Father's house are many mansions'; as we gaze at Him climbing Calvary's Hill and hear the words, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do', 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit'; deep calls unto deep and we can only worship and adore.

Here then is the real reason for the rise of religion, and in the face of so much that is dark and mysterious for its continuing hold upon men. Moving through this world men have been constantly aware of another Presence, have felt deep calling unto deep, a deep in the universe about them calling to the deep in their own souls, and they have been constrained to worship and obey.

Two further things I should like to add. The first is this, that it is only as we live deep down, as through prayer and

worship and stillness we make opportunity for deep to call unto deep, that we find real peace. Take the age-long problem of suffering: why should this have happened to him, so young and so promising? Why should my loved one have been taken? What have I done to deserve this? As long as we ask these questions in the shallows, debating them as we debate any other question, we shall never be satisfied. But ask them in the deep places: on your knees, at the foot of the Cross, at the Communion Table, and what then? Well, your question may not be answered, but *you* will be answered. You will hear deep calling unto deep, and in some strange way be assured that all is well, that you will not be left comfortless. So was Job delivered from his darkness. He had suffered cruelly. He had asked all the desperate questions that men do ask in such straits. He had heard from his friends all the conventional answers. But he had found no peace. Then he was led out, out among the immensities of nature and he felt, as it were, a cooling hand laid upon him, heard deep calling unto deep, and though his questions were not answered, *he* Job was answered, answered in his inmost soul, answered with a sense of the Eternal.

Part of the art of true living, Dr. Hutton used to say, is to know where to ask your questions. That place is on your knees, in church, before the Cross. And though your immediate question may not be answered, *you* will be answered, for you will hear deep calling unto deep, and you will be content to wait and to trust.

And the last thing I want to add is this. This deep in the universe which in our greatest moments we hear calling to the deep in our own souls is really the voice of a Father calling to His child. In every age men have heard deep calling unto deep, but they have not always been sure of the exact note of the deep. Jesus said that the deep which calls is the deep of a Father's heart, calling His child home. And He died on a Cross to prove it.



## 2

# The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

—I Corinthians 16<sup>23</sup>

THESE are singularly lovely words, but, as with so many lovely words in the Christian vocabulary, long familiarity has dimmed their lustre, and to many of us the speaking of them has become just a signal that the service is almost over and that we should feel for our spectacle-case and get ready to depart.

But there are times when their beauty and sublimity do seem to light up and bring a hush to our spirits. I can well remember the first time these words came home to me. I was only a boy, and the preacher at the evening service in my father's church was an old missionary who, although he had reached retiring age yet because of the shortage of men, was about to return for yet another period of service in the foreign field. He had been in to tea and I had listened spellbound to his talk, and so I continued to listen in church to his sermon, and when at the close he lifted up his hands and said, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you', it brought home to me so overpowering a sense of the seriousness of life and at the same time of the adequacy of Jesus Christ that I can remember it to this day. And I imagine many of us can remember similar occasions in our own experience when these words did seem suddenly to spring to

life and alight directly on us: when they were pronounced after we had made the vows which admitted us to the membership of the church, when they were pronounced after we had pledged ourselves for better or for worse at our marriage service, when they were pronounced as a hushed little company we left the darkened home for the last rite of all. And I know as a minister that I can never pronounce these words without being solemnized by them. They seem to bring with them a sense of the communion of saints, to compass a congregation about with the great cloud of witnesses. After all, they have been spoken, these self-same words, in every Christian service in every age: in the dark catacombs where the early Christians met in constant fear of arrest, in the little dissenting meeting-houses where at any moment the worship might be interrupted by the arrival of magistrate and soldiers, among the bare hills of Galloway where the Covenanters gathered to break bread. Wherever men and women have gathered in the name of Christ, in stately cathedral, in humble chapel, in the open air, no matter what their particular name or sign, these words have been used, binding them all together into one great family in heaven and on earth. These words seem to sum up, to crystallize, Christian experience all through the ages, to speak of man's sore need and God's pity and response.

But can we say a little more definitely what these familiar words mean? Can we say what would really happen to us if, after we had left a service, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ did actually go with us?

One thing that would most certainly happen would be that in all our words, in all our thoughts, in all our actions, there would be a new *graciousness*. For that is one meaning of the word 'grace', just '*graciousness*'. And though it is not easy to say exactly what we mean by the word 'graciousness', we all quickly recognize the quality when we meet with it. A friend of mine was once travelling on a very hot day in a very

over-crowded train. The train stopped at a station and the door of the compartment opposite where he was standing in the corridor was opened. There appeared a mother, tired and flushed, with two children by her side and one in her arms. Those nearest the door made it perfectly clear by their looks that no new-comers would be welcome, and the poor woman was terribly flustered and embarrassed. Then a tall man in the far corner took the situation in hand. He stepped across the compartment, smilingly told the woman to come in, made a little space next to him for her and the baby, took one of the other children on his knee, and quickly put the woman at her ease by chatting about her holiday. In a moment or two everybody's previous iciness was thawed, and there was an atmosphere of general friendliness, and it was all due to what? To the 'graciousness' of the tall man in the corner. And there is Michael Fairless's story of the old stone-breaker, how one day there came to him the village Magdalene telling him she was hungry. And he told her to go away a distance until he had finished his meal, and then he would make a sign to her and she could come and take what was left. Then his heart smote him. That simply would not do. So he called her again, and bade her come when the meal was ready and take it first. He would have what was left. The 'graciousness' of that old stone-breaker!

And how readily we associate this quality with Jesus! To think of Him is to think of graciousness. There was that leper who called out to Him for healing, and He did not keep His distance and speak the healing word from there. He went right up to the poor creature and touched him, giving him to feel that for all his loathsome disease Jesus of Nazareth was his brother. And there was that woman taken in sin, flung at His feet by the self-righteous Pharisees for condemnation, and He felt her embarrassment as though it were His own, and simply quietly said, 'Go, and sin no more'. The 'graciousness' of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's curious, isn't it, how many good people lack this extra quality of graciousness. They are the soul of integrity, in many ways the salt of the earth, but there is about them a certain hardness, a certain brusqueness, a want of charm and winsomeness that alienates and spoils their influence. Their goodness lacks a 'gracious somewhat'. Like the 'good' woman described in a recent novel: 'One cannot deny her halo; only it seems to be fixed on with barbed wire.' Isn't it true that the last part of many of us really to be converted is our manners?

Of Courtesy it is much less  
Than Courage of Heart or Holiness,  
Yet in my Walks it seems to me  
That the Grace of God is in Courtesy.

It is, and if the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ really did rest on us, the first result would be a new courtesy, a new winsomeness, a new 'graciousness' in all our relations with others.

*And also a new humility.* For a second meaning of the phrase, 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ' is *the forgiving love of our Lord Jesus Christ*, that love which, though often despised and rejected, refused to be estranged but kept on loving to the end; that love which took Him to the Cross, and even when they had driven in the nails moved Him to pray, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'.

Paul, for one, could never forget that forgiving love of Jesus. It was the great light of all his seeing, the central fact of all his living and thinking. He had had such an overwhelming experience of it. There had been a time when he had sinned grievously against that Jesus, had denied His claims, had blasphemed His name, had persecuted His followers, had stood by consenting to the first Christian martyr's death. But Jesus had never turned His face from him, had never withdrawn in wounded pride, had never decided he was



not worth bothering about. No, He had waited and waited, and planned and planned, and knocked and knocked, until on the road to Damascus Paul could resist those wounded hands no longer, and he opened the door and let in the Christ. But that Christ should have so bothered about him, should have so meekly borne all the blows he had dealt Him and loved on—Paul could never get used to the wonder of that. The thought of it constantly brought him to his knees and stripped him of every shred of pride. Hence when he writes to any of his converts, he sums up all his prayers for them with the words, ‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you’. That is, ‘May the sense that you are sinners who have been forgiven, may that ever be with you. Then will you be kept walking softly all your days, kept humble, kept kind and considerate in all your judgements of others’. For nothing does so humble us, so bring us to our knees, so melt our pride and soften our hearts, as the piercing realization that someone we have wronged still loves us, still believes in us, is willing to forgive.

Romney, the artist, was married at the age of nineteen but, because Reynolds and other painters told him that ‘marriage spoilt an artist’, he left his wife and scarcely saw her again till the end of his life. When, old and desolate and nearly mad, he went back to her, she didn’t spurn him but received him and nursed him till his death. And Tennyson in his poem, ‘Romney’s Remorse’, pictures him, wandering in his mind, wondering who it is that nurses him with so gentle a touch.

Have I not met you somewhere long ago?  
I am all but sure I have—in Kendal Church.

And then,

I am ashamed. I am a trouble to you,  
Could kneel for your forgiveness. Are they tears?  
For me—they do me too much grace—for me?  
O Mary, Mary.

What broke Romney, you see, was his wife's forgiving love. It did him 'too much grace'. So does the forgiving love of Christ. And as at the foot of the Cross we realize that forgiving love, realize that 'the Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me', we pour contempt on all our pride, and rise from our knees chastened and forgiving.

Lastly, 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ' means *all the strength, all the enhancement of our personalities that comes from the realization of the presence of the living Christ at our side*. This is why we speak of prayer, reading the New Testament, worship, the Sacrament, all being 'means of grace'. We mean they so lead us into the living presence of Christ that we come forth new creatures, with new strength, new light, new purposefulness.

'Our chief want in life,' writes Emerson, 'is somebody who shall make us do what we can. This is the service of a friend. With him we are easily great. There is a sublime attraction in him to whatever virtue there is in us. . . . A real friend doubles my possibilities and adds his strength to mine, and makes a well-nigh irresistible force possible to me.' Mercifully, we have all known one or two friends like that, people in whose presence all that is base and mean simply withers away, while all that is fine and clean and strong comes to the surface and takes possession. Supremely does this happen in the presence of Jesus. As we look up at Him, we know that He is all that we were meant to be. But we know also how desperately far short we constantly fall, and we are tempted to despair. But if we wait long enough, we shall feel something happening, a peace, a strength flowing in, and we shall be lifted to our feet. It is 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ', His renewing of our personalities by His living presence.

'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you!' What more embracing wish or prayer could there be? For if that grace did truly rest upon us, there would be about us a new graciousness, a new humility, an adequacy for all things.

## 3

## Baffled to fight Better

*Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in:  
come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem.*

—Nehemiah 2 <sup>17</sup>

THIS LITTLE book of Nehemiah, at least the first six chapters of it, is some of the most fascinating reading in all the Old Testament. Many of us can remember the vivid impression it made when we were young: the picture of Nehemiah rising in the night, saddling a horse and alone riding round the walls of the ruined Jerusalem to assess the extent of the work required; the subsequent building of those walls, the difficulties encountered and overcome, the people with the strange foreign names who sought to interfere. And when we are older, the book still retains its power, for to build the walls of Jerusalem is still the task to which we are all called, and Nehemiah himself is the sort of person who makes a strong appeal to our rather practical, matter-of-fact British minds. We feel at home with him, far more at home than with many of the other characters of the Old Testament who seem to belong to a world and a background far removed from our own.

Why? Why does Nehemiah make such an appeal? What are the man's outstanding characteristics? They aren't difficult to discover, for the first six chapters of his book are really in the nature of a diary, and a man reveals himself very intimately in that kind of personal writing.

The first thing about him that stands out very clearly is his

intense feeling of social responsibility. At the time his book opens he was, he tells us, cup-bearer to the Persian king, Artaxerxes, in Shushan, the principal city of the Persian empire, and in those days of constant intrigue and not infrequent poisonings, only one who was very high in the royal confidence could have held such a post. But Nehemiah was not a Persian, but a Jew, and when he hears that those of his brethren who some years before had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the ravaged city were having an exceedingly hard time of it, that disappointment was following disappointment, that the part of the wall they had managed to restore had been broken down again and the gates burned with fire, he is thrown into the deepest dejection. 'And it came to pass,' he writes, 'when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept.' And try as he would, he could not throw off this feeling of utter dejection. Even in the king's presence he could not dissemble it. 'Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart.' And it was nothing else but sorrow of heart. But sorrow of heart not for himself, but for the plight of the city of his fathers, and he can get no rest until he obtains permission from the king to leave his court and set out for Jerusalem and try to reorganize this stupendous task of rebuilding.

We can well imagine what many of his Persian friends said when first he announced his intention. They would have told him he was crazy. There he was, living a life of comfort in the king's palace, high in the king's regard: why impulsively throw it all up for a life of certain hardship and constant difficulty? Surely, they would argue, there are hosts of others who can get on with the tedious business of wall building. Why should you with your gifts and your position need to rush off? And Nehemiah probably felt the force of their arguments, but they did not shake his conviction that he must go. After all, he was a Jew. Jerusalem was his city and the

city of his ancestors. To it and its traditions and its religion he owed an enormous debt. He must help to pay that debt. He could not bear to think that others were trying to pay theirs, while he was living at ease. He must go. And he went.

Nehemiah was, you see, possessed of an intense sense of social responsibility, responsibility to the community, to the city, to the nation. He was one of those people who could never be content to regard life as simply affording him an opportunity for getting on, for making money, for achieving power and position. He was always conscious of others, of their needs, of an overpowering obligation to serve.

Is not the clamant need of this moment more people of Nehemiah's spirit? So many today seem to think almost solely in terms of what the community owes them. Not service, but grab is their motto. And with that kind of outlook no better things can be hoped for. Earth's finest ones have never assumed that the world owes them all that they can get. Rather have they assumed that they owe the world all that they can give, and like Nehemiah they have sought to put in, not just take out.

The second quality about Nehemiah that stands out very clearly is his indomitable perseverance, his being baffled only to fight better. Once he puts his hand to the plough he never looks back. Often must he have been tempted to look back, for the actual work of rebuilding the walls was a grim, difficult business, exceedingly prosaic and unromantic. Jerusalem was surrounded by enemies who did everything in their power to hinder. They began by sneering at the builders and trying to undermine morale. When this failed, they resorted to violence, so that the Jews had to work with their swords girded to their sides and constantly getting in the way. And then there were the faint-hearted and pessimistic among the builders themselves, the people like Judah who were always moaning: 'The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build



the wall.' But Nehemiah refused to be discouraged either by foes without or within. On he went, doggedly laying stone upon stone.

So has all the work of building Jerusalem been accomplished. In Blake's great words and with Parry's great tune we sing about it in church, and it all sounds so thrilling and romantic. But actually it is not all romance and thrills. Most of it is committees and clubs and Sunday Schools, caring costingly for individuals, sticking to a small job and doing it week after week whether you always feel like it or not. And some people readily tire. It's not exciting enough for them. But not the Nehemiahs. Through disappointment upon disappointment they keep going, never looking back. Such a one was Dr. Barnardo. When he began his great work, you would imagine that hundreds would have flocked to his standard. But it wasn't so. Barnardo had to face constant financial difficulties, even persecution, but he refused to give up, and when any said, 'It can't be done', he invariably replied, 'Such a phrase is not in my vocabulary'. Such a one was Studdert-Kennedy who in the days after the first world war sought desperately to build the City of God only to meet with constant frustration, but who still went on crying:

We shall build on!

We shall build on!

On through the cynic's scorning

On through the coward's warning

On through the cheat's suborning,

We shall build on!

Christ, though my hands be bleeding,

Fierce though my flesh be pleading,

Still let me see Thee leading,

Let me build on!

These are the true saviours of humanity, the ones who like Nehemiah see a job to be done, and, whether it be small or

great, get on with it and allow no one to weaken their hands.

A third thing about Nehemiah that stands out and to some of us especially appeals is the essential sanity of the man's religion, his combination of faith and prayer with hard practical work and organization. Again and again you find him describing how he lifted up his hands in prayer. But you never find him making his very real belief in prayer an excuse for unpreparedness against the enemy or for slackness in the work of his hands. That ninth verse in the fourth chapter sums up his constant attitude: 'We made our prayer unto our God, *and* set a watch against them day and night.' He reminds you of Moody and Mott of whom it was said: 'Moody and Mott planned for the Sessions of their Summer School as though there were no such thing as prayer; and they prayed as though there were no such thing as organization.' Or of David Livingstone of whom D. C. Somervell wrote: 'In every conceivable emergency, Livingstone could be relied upon to do two things: to say his prayers *and* take his astronomical bearings.'

So often we are inclined to divide religious people into two classes: the people of prayer and the people of practical activity, the Mary type and the Martha type, the worshipper and the worker. A truly religious person ought like Nehemiah to combine both sets of qualities. God has so fashioned this world that there are many things in it we must do ourselves, but He doesn't leave us alone to do them. He is constantly at our side, and we have only to turn to Him to get all the strength and guidance we need. There is no prayer more characteristic of Nehemiah than the short one: 'O God, strengthen my *hands*.' Not just my heart or my mind or my will, but my hands, my hands which do things. Such a prayer might well serve as a model for all our prayers.

The truly religious man is a man of two worlds, a man of the hill-top and of the plain, a man of prayer and of practical

activity. Without prayer work is apt to decline into mere drudgery, and we lose all resilience and sap and vision. Without work, and work as efficient as we can make it, prayer is so much self-indulgence and hypocrisy.

Lastly, one cannot help being impressed by Nehemiah's complete identification of himself with his fellow-workers. After all, he was their leader, he had held a high position in a foreign court, he was a man of outstanding gifts, he had been used to very comfortable living. He might have felt justified in claiming some extra privileges. But he never did. Former governors had taken money and provisions from the people, but he refused to do so. Some with their inside knowledge had speculated in land, but he spurned all such sharp practice. And when things were so tense that the builders did not dare take off their clothes, neither did he. And his table was always at the disposal of those in need.

Lawrence of Arabia once wrote that the Arabs taught him 'that no man could be their leader except he ate the ranks' food, wore their clothes, lived level with them, and yet appeared better in himself'. It's surely true of all great leadership. It was true of Nehemiah. It was true of Jesus. We call Him Saviour, because He ate our food, wore our clothes, lived level with us, came right in where we are.

There's a story told of a handful of men and a Brigadier who from the beaches of Dunkirk at last reached a British port, sadly battered and tired beyond words. An official received them and directed them to the rest-centre. 'It's only a mile or two up the road,' he began, addressing the Brigadier. Then, noticing his rank, he said, 'Your men will find it quite easily, Sir. My chauffeur will be glad to run you up in my car.' 'Thanks,' replied the officer. 'It's thoughtful of you; but we've kept together through thick and thin, these lads and I, and I think we'll keep together to the end.'

Such a leader was Nehemiah—in with his men right to the end.

## 4

## Microscope or Telescope

*And Balak said unto him, Come, I pray thee, with me unto another place, from whence thou mayest see them: thou shalt see but the utmost part of them, and shalt not see them all: and curse me them from thence.*

—Numbers 23<sup>13</sup>

IT WAS the ancient belief that the blessings and the cursings of a prophet really did avail: that is to say, that those whom the prophet blessed would as a certain consequence be attended by good fortune, whereas those whom he cursed would be dogged by disaster.

It was in the strength of this belief that Balak, the king of Moab, sent for Balaam, the prophet, to come and curse the children of Israel who, in the course of their journeyings to the promised land, had recently entered his territory. Balak had been thoroughly alarmed by their sudden appearance. He felt that they were so many and so mighty that he could not possibly prevail against them in his own unaided strength. He must have on his side the supernatural aids which only a prophet could let loose. So he sends some messengers to Balaam, beseeching him to come and curse these terrifying invaders. Most of us will remember the story of these messengers' two interviews with the prophet: how at the first he utterly refused to accede to their request, but how at the second, tempted by the promise of lavish rewards, he shut his ears to the inner voice, and set off for Moab with the deputation. Most of us will also recall how all through that journey

everything seemed to conspire against Balaam. It was God planting thorns about his feet, seeking to call him back to the true way. Why, the very ass on which he was riding seemed to reproach him with his weakness. However, he rode on with the deputation to Moab, and Balak the king came forth to meet him.

The day after his arrival, Balak took him up to a high hill from whence he could see all the hosts of Israel gathered in the plains below, and he called on him to curse. But at long last, Balaam's better self prevailed and he refused. 'How shall I curse,' he asked, 'whom God hath not cursed? How shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied?' Balak, needless to say, was considerably annoyed. What's the good, he asks, of sending for a man to curse your enemies if, when he comes, he does nothing but bless? But though for the moment he is nonplussed, he does not give up. He thinks again, and then makes a very astute move. He leads Balaam up another hill, a much lower hill, a mere rising in the ground, from which he can see only a small part of the Israelite forces, and from there he beseeches him now to curse.

Why was that move so astute? Why from that lower hill did he expect Balaam to do what he had refused to do from the higher? Because Balak knew that in life when men see a thing whole they usually give thanks, whereas when they see only part of it they are inclined to blame and curse. It is this thought which lay behind Balak's leading Balaam to the lower hill from whence he could see only a part of Israel which leads me to the truth I want to stress in this sermon. It's this—that if in life we want to discover the truth about anything or anybody, we must take pains to see that thing or person whole. If we don't, if we are content to look merely at a part, we shall get a totally wrong impression.

To begin with, think how true this is in our estimate of the Bible. Not infrequently we run up against people who quite definitely consider the Bible completely outmoded, a



book which no intelligent man today would waste his time reading, let alone studying. And when you ask these people to justify their opinion, what do they usually do? They point to the story of the creation of the world in six days, and say that simply is not true; to the story of the sun standing still in the time of Joshua, and tell you that every schoolboy knows that is impossible; to Samuel's ordering the indiscriminate slaughter of the Amalekites—men, women and little children—and tell you that such conduct was just savage and barbaric.

In other words, these people's estimate of the Bible is based upon their looking just at odd bits of it. If they took the trouble to look at the Bible whole, their judgement of it would be totally different. And that is the only way to come to a true judgement of the scriptures: to realize that the Bible is not just one book, but a whole library of books, written at different times in the nation's history, and by different men, some of whom were more sensitive to the things of the spirit than others; to see it as the record of God's progressive revelation of Himself culminating in the giving of the full light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. See the Bible whole, then you will realize how it is like no other book, how only through it can you in Paul's phrase be 'made wise unto salvation'. See it only in isolated bits, and your bewilderment may be great.

It is exactly the same in our estimate of the history of the Church. Those critics who tell us that they have no time for the Church because of its past record, on what do they base their judgement? On the usual blots of which everyone is aware on the pages of Church history; on the Churchmen of the fourth and fifth centuries who hurled anathemas at one another because of differences in theological thinking; on the persecution of Galileo in the Middle Ages because of his insistence that the earth revolves round the sun and not the sun round the earth; on the way many of the bishops of

the last century hindered men like Shaftesbury in all their attempts to get better factory conditions. In other words, their criticism of the Church is based on just isolated incidents in its history. We don't want to gloss over these incidents. They were shameful and we admit it, admit it humbly, knowing that we too are sinners and have our blind spots as well. But just to fasten exclusively on these incidents is not fair and can never lead to a true estimate of the Church in history. The only way to arrive at that is to look at the Church's record whole.

Then what do you see? You see the miracle of its early growth, how from incredibly lowly beginnings it rapidly spread over all the then known world. You see how, in spite of many mistakes, it has handed on the torch of Christian faith from generation to generation, how in every age it has seemed to have deep within it the power of self-renewal, how in the long run it has found its way out of every grave in which the world has sought to bury it. You see how in the midst of every kind of selfishness and hatred, it has preached and practised brotherhood and charity and love, how today it has created a bond which is stronger than that of nation or colour or class. To judge the Church, look at it whole, not just at little bits which we all know to be unworthy.

It is the same with the missionary enterprise of the Church. We are all familiar with the usual criticism of those who say they don't believe in foreign missions. These critics once travelled with a missionary who was a narrow-minded bigot, or out in Africa they had a servant who called himself a Christian and was thoroughly dishonest, or years ago their uncle visited a mission station where the natives were compelled to wear European dress. So it goes on, and often in the same conversation these same critics will admit that Christianity is the one hope of this tragically sick world. Well, if it is, then on with foreign missions! For that is what missionaries aim at, simply to make more Christians. We

have got to take a total view of the world nowadays. Various forces are struggling for victory. Which do we want to win? Aggressive nationalism? Aggressive Communism? Or Christianity? See the missionary enterprise whole, see it on a world scale, and then you cannot but approve.

Now think of our judgements of our fellows. What is it at the root of so many of our harsh judgements? Isn't it that often we allow one irritating aspect to blot out all the rest, completely to distort our view of the whole person? The only way truly to judge our fellows is to try to see them whole, and usually then our judgement passes into understanding.

Here, for instance, is a man who is always 'agin the government', whether it be the government of the country or the church or a society in the church. Always is he picking faults, insinuating that the powers that be have got something up their sleeves and that that something is not for the good of all. Such a man can be a shocking source of irritation. But generally if we try to look at that man whole, look at the kind of home he had, at the disappointing business experience he has had, at the shut-in life circumstances have compelled him to live, our irritation changes into patience. Or here is a woman who seems to have no backbone, who cries out at the first difficulty, and crumples up before every challenge. Very often we are tempted to give up trying to help such a person. We say she is hopeless. But again if we look at that person whole, at the upbringing she has had, at the temperament she has inherited, at the shocks which have come her way, we shall be ashamed of our impatience, and decide to try again.

The only way truly to judge our fellows is to try to see all of them, not just the bit that constantly irritates. We all have our irritating sides, and none of us would care to be judged solely by them.

Finally, it is the only way to judge the world and life. Often today we are inclined to bemoan the times in which we live, to complain they are so out of joint they will never be

able to be put right again. The cure is to get to a high hill where we can see things whole. Then we shall realize that in the world's history there have been harsh periods of transition like ours before, but the human race with its astonishing resilience and under the guiding hand of the living God has worked its way through them, and worked its way to something worthier. And it will do so in this century, if we keep up our hearts and are obedient to the vision. 'The lesson of life,' wrote Emerson, 'is to believe what the years and centuries say, against the hours.'

It is the same in our private experience. When life has hit us a very heavy blow and we are laid low, we are apt to cry out against it and say there is no God. Our mood is understandable enough, but it comes of fastening on just a part of life and forgetting the rest. In James Hilton's novel, *We Are Not Alone*, a girl who has attempted suicide tells the doctor she did so because she was sick of life. And the doctor replies, 'Not of *life*, my dear; but of sickness, drabness, insecurity'. In her distress, you see, she was painting all life in the dismal colour of one particular portion of it.

'I have often found,' writes Dr. L. P. Jacks in his *The Confession of an Octogenarian*, 'that experience which inclines me to pessimism when studied under a microscope has the opposite effect when viewed through a telescope.'

Hence the title of this sermon. To discover the truth about the Bible, about the Church, about our fellows, about life, the telescope is the instrument, not the microscope. For we only see rightly as we try to see whole, and that is what a good church service does for us. It lifts our eyes to the hills, sets our feet in a large place, helps us to a true measure of all things.

## 5

## Managing our Doubts

**G**EORGE MÜLLER of Bristol—who never once appealed for money for his Orphanages, but all the time maintained them solely by faith and prayer—was once asked whether he had ever doubted in religion. After a little thought, he replied: ‘Yes, I once doubted for five minutes.’

Not many of us, I imagine, would dare to confess to only five minutes of doubt. Of course, there are some fortunate people whose faith never seems to be disturbed. There are the calm, unruffled souls who retain a certain child-like faith right to the end, a faith which nothing seems able to upset. Quite early they gave their lives over to God, and from that time on nothing seems to shake them. Then there are the very practical people who say they never have the time to indulge doubts. There is a job to be done and they get on with the doing of it, and the faith that was good enough for St. Paul and David Livingstone, they say, is good enough for them! But these surely are the rare ones. The majority of us know only too well our moments of doubt: doubt of God’s reality, doubt of any meaning in things, doubt of immortality, doubt of any hope for the world.

Many go through an intense period of doubt in youth. They have been brought up in good Christian homes, taught to say their prayers and go to church and read their Bibles, and because they have respected their parents and minister they have accepted quite naturally religious beliefs. Then they have gone up to the University or out into the



world to earn their living, and they have made the shattering discovery that many of their teachers, many of the people about them simply pooh-pooh religion, summarily dismiss it as a childish superstition, and for months they seem to be struggling in a shoreless sea. Others go through their worst period of doubt in middle age. Then the shine has rather gone off things. Doors have not been opened. Dreams have not been realized. Worry seems to succeed worry and 'weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seems all the uses of this world'. Middle age can be a desperately difficult time, and I remember a friend once saying that he believed that every man went through a time of intense upset in his forties with the result that he either worked through to a deeper and more satisfying faith or threw up the whole religious business altogether. But it's not only in youth or middle age that doubt raises its ugly head. At any time, all the journey through, we may have to do battle with it, and most people's realest doubts arise not through their reading of disturbing books, but through their experience of life's rebuffs. Life, they feel, is not being fair to them. It has snatched away loved ones, dogged their footsteps with disappointment—how can there be a good God?

Of course, there are some doubts which are really not sincere. They are simply what the psychologist calls 'a defence mechanism'. Some people don't *want* the religious interpretation of life to be true. They don't want to be disturbed and challenged by it. They want to go the way of a certain low passion, of a certain worldly ambition, and because this is their real desire they say they have seen through all religion, have come to realize it is something no intellectually honest man could have anything to do with. Their trouble, of course, is not that they have seen through religion, but that religion has seen and is seeing through them, and they don't like it. Never let us forget that while it is true that we live only as deeply as we believe, it is also true that we believe

only as deeply as we live. 'If any man will do God's will,' said Jesus, 'he shall know.' But he shall not know if he is intent simply on his own sinful will.

But it's of the sincere person, the person who cries, 'Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief', the person who wants to down his doubts, I'm thinking of in this sermon. How is he to win the victory?

To begin with, it is well to remind ourselves that *the creed of unbelief has its difficulties as well as the creed of belief*; that if, in other words, we decide to give up belief in the truths of religion, we shan't thereby attain to complete mental peace. There will always be certain experiences which will disturb and remind us of the God we have denied. The Dean of Canterbury has told how once he was travelling in Russia with a girl Communist who called herself an unabashed materialist. The sun began to set over some snow-clad hills and both of them stood silent and awed by the beauty of the scene. Afterwards he asked the girl how she fitted her feelings in the presence of that sunset into her materialist philosophy of life? She hesitated and then confessed she could not fit them in. Of course, she could not. Neither could she nor anyone else fit into a materialist view of life what all of us feel in our deepest moments: when we are in love, when we look down at the sleeping form of our firstborn, when we have been stirred by music or poetry, when we look into the heart of a rose, when we read from the psalmist or prophet or in the gospels hear the voice of Jesus. Then we feel 'immortal longings' in us; then we are conscious of 'a Presence that disturbs us with the joy of elevated thoughts'. Never let us imagine that the way of unbelief is all plainsailing. Doubt has its difficulties just as much as faith.

But this is a rather general consideration. What can be said about managing our doubts when the battle is actually on?

*Firstly, when the waves of doubt are threatening to submerge you, hold on to what of a surety you do know.* ‘When you sit stuck before a problem,’ a mathematics master used to advise his boys, ‘begin by putting down what you do know.’ It’s sound advice. So Browning tells us he worked through the doubts of young-manhood by clinging to this fact—that he had always had ‘a need, a trust, a yearning after God’. So Tennyson tells us in ‘In Memoriam’ that whenever he heard a voice ‘believe no more’:

A warmth within the breast would melt  
The freezing reason’s colder part,  
And like a man in wrath the heart  
Stood up and answer’d ‘I have felt’.

Similarly William James confessed that what held him from a creed of no-God was that whenever he heard such a creed expounded, something deep within him whispered, ‘*Bosh!*’ And in a famous passage Robertson of Brighton wrote: ‘In the darkest hour, whatever else is doubtful, this is at least certain. If there be no God, no future state yet, even then, it is better to be generous than selfish, chaste than licentious, true than false, brave than a coward. Blessed is the man who in the tempestuous darkness of the soul has dared to hold fast to these venerable landmarks. His night shall pass into clear day.’

Yes, one way to disperse your doubts is to hold fast to what you do know: to the deepest yearnings of your heart, to your sense of right and wrong, to the memory of those shining hours when you were aware of Another beside you. Hold fast to these certainties, doggedly walk in their light, and slowly the clouds will lift.

*Secondly, when the mists of doubt settle on your soul and you wonder whether God is, recall the testimony of others.* In every age men have claimed that they have had experience of God, and they have left their witness enshrined in the

literature of every nation. And they all speak the same language so that you and I of today can understand what a psalmist of centuries ago was writing about. Can they all have been wrong? At the moment perhaps we may not be very sure of God, but they were. Would we dare to put our doubt against their certainty? A traveller tells how once he was in Japan for a month, and always within sight of Mt. Fuji. Yet he never once saw the sacred mountain. It was the rainy season and thick clouds obscured all views. But, he says, he never doubted the mountain was there. Its snow-capped summit was the motif of designs on china and fans and screens. Hotels and tea-houses proclaimed their situations as commanding fine prospects of it. Trips to it and arrangements for climbing it were advertised. It was impossible to believe that so many thousands of people had in so many different ways been the victims of a delusion. So surely is it impossible to believe that so many thousands in so many different ways and in so many different ages have been the victims of a delusion in their certainty of God. For the moment clouds may veil Him from our sight, but others have seen Him and we dare not dismiss their age-long testimony. As someone has said, 'Carlyle may not always have seen God; but he had no doubt his old mother did'; and in her witness he rested. So we. We may not always be certain of God, but we can have no doubt that Isaiah was, that Paul was, that Francis of Assisi was, that John Wesley was, and in their certainty we can plod on.

When then your light burns low, recall the testimony of others. No, not only recall it. Steep yourself in it. Take down the Bible and read over some of the psalms and epistles; take down the hymn-book and read over some of the great experiential hymns; recall some saint you have known and the look on his or her face in church. Stay your mind on these testimonies and memories, and your doubts will lose their hold.



*But in the last resort, the surest way to manage your doubts is to consider Jesus.* If ever anyone had reason to doubt, He had. Despised, rejected, deserted, crucified! Well might He have argued there is no God, nothing but a vast imbecility behind things. But He never did. As He Himself put it, 'I live by the Father', and even on that blood-stained Cross He quietly committed His spirit into the Father's hands. Would we presume to say that Jesus was deluded in His certainty? Would we not prefer to say that He with His purity of heart and deep spiritual sensitiveness was able to see far more deeply into reality than we with our sin and blindness are ever able to?

'There was a time during the 1914-18 war,' writes Professor Farmer, 'when the black, irrational horror and cruelty of it laid hold of the soul and plunged it into shuddering unbelief. . . . There was only this anchor to the soul at such a time, that out of the midst of the same world as had produced the war, had come the perfect love of Jesus, proved up to the hilt by His Cross; and that love had been utterly and absolutely sure of God's to the end. One faced the choice as to whether Jesus or the war misrepresented God. And the answer came from the depths of the soul, filling it with light: not Jesus, not Jesus. *Such love as His could not be nourished by a lie.*' It could not. But if you surrender to your doubts, you are saying it could. You are saying that the life and death of Jesus were built on a lie. Would you dare to say that? It's wise sometimes to face the stark alternatives. Either Jesus was right in His reading of life, or He was deceived, or He was a deliberate deceiver.

It is said that when Mrs. Einstein, the wife of the discoverer of relativity, reached America after her own and her husband's banishment from Germany, the reporters gathered round and asked, 'Do you know all about relativity?' 'No,' replied Mrs. Einstein, 'I don't, but I know my husband.'



So there are many things in this world you and I know little about, which our frail, finite minds can know little about. But we do know Jesus: know His quiet certainty, His sure confidence, His peace of mind even on the night in which He was betrayed, and as we look up to Him dying on that Cross and still saying 'Father', no longer can we doubt.

## 6

### A Threefold Portrait

*Now when He had ended all His sayings in the audience of the people, He entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion . . . —Luke 7<sup>1-10</sup>*

ONE OF the interesting things about this centurion at Capernaum is that we are allowed to see him through three different pairs of eyes. We are allowed to see him through his own eyes, then through the eyes of his neighbours, then through the eyes of Jesus; and in each case what we see is different. From his own point of view he is one kind of man. From the point of view of his neighbours he is another kind. While from the point of view of Jesus he is a third kind.

Of course, three different portraits could be painted of each one of us reading this. There is the portrait of ourselves as we see ourselves, the kind of person we would depict if we were to write our autobiography. There is the portrait of ourselves as others see us, the kind of person that would be depicted were another to write our biography. There is the

portrait of ourselves as God sees us; God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; God, who searches deep within and knows every motive and aim; God, who sees us when we are alone, when the mask we wear before our fellows is taken off. Part, surely, of what we call 'judgement' will be simply seeing ourselves as God sees us, seeing ourselves in the scorching light of His throne.

Now let us look at these three different portraits of this centurion. Maybe in examining them we shall come to see ourselves a little more clearly, our weaknesses and our needs.

To begin with, let us look at him through the eyes of his neighbours in that busy lake-side town of Capernaum. We are often told that it would be good for us if we could see ourselves as others see us, the insinuation being that the result would not be too encouraging. But what others saw in this centurion was distinctly flattering. The elders of the Jews beseech Jesus that He would come instantly to heal the centurion's servant, saying, 'That he was worthy for whom He should do this: for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.'

Now, in the light of the circumstances of those days, that was a very remarkable testimony to that centurion. For, remember, this centurion at Capernaum was the representative of Rome, and Rome was bitterly hated by the Jews. She was forcibly occupying their country. She denied them many liberties. She levied heavy taxes. She made little attempt to conceal her conviction that these Jews were an inferior people. Recall how at the trial of Jesus, Pilate sneered, 'Am I a Jew?' as much as to say, 'God forbid!' That centurion, when first he had taken over at Capernaum, would have been surrounded with a seemingly impenetrable wall of suspicion and prejudice and active dislike. But somehow he had managed to break it all down, so that by the time Jesus visits the town the very leaders of the Jews petition in favour of him.

And the gospel story leaves us in no doubt as to what it was in him which enabled him to overcome all the deeply engrained prejudice against him. 'He is worthy,' say the elders of the Jews to Jesus. 'For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.' In other words they say, 'This Roman has somehow been different. He's never been uppish, never been supercilious, never carried on as though he were the member of a superior race. No, he's always been friendly, always respected our laws and customs, taken pains even to understand them. Above all, he's never sneered at our religion, odd though at first some of it must have seemed to him. On the contrary, he's been deeply interested in it, has read our sacred books, has even built us a synagogue.' There was, as we have seen, every temptation for this Roman centurion to have behaved differently. He was the representative of the occupying power. He was the representative of a power that ruled most of the then known world. And at the beginning the Jews with their strange food taboos and sabbath taboos must have seemed a distinctly queer people, quite definitely not nearly on the level of Rome. But he had managed to conquer every tendency in himself to sneer and look down, had constantly reminded himself that there were other national gifts beside the Roman gifts of military and administrative skill, had taken pains to get alongside this people he had been appointed to govern and learn to appreciate their traditions and endowments.

One can't help wondering sometimes if we British people would have had all our recent trouble in India, if more of our representatives there had behaved in the spirit of this centurion. In one of his novels, Edward Thompson makes an educated Indian say: 'Through these three centuries countless Englishmen have shown us courage, honour, justice. We are not forgetful of this, though we will not acknowledge it now. But hardly one has shown the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.' And in reviewing a book by an Arab who had been at Oxford,

who says that if he had never seen the English at home, but only abroad, he would have hated them, the critic wrote that wherever we may have succeeded in our governing of other races, we do seem to have failed in our social relationships. This centurion hadn't. He had been friendly, and was not only respected, but loved.

So much for his neighbours' view of him—a friendly, religious soul, very different from the usual run of Roman. Now for his idea of himself. It's very different. It's all summed up in those four words, 'I am not worthy'—'not worthy' to make the initial approach to Jesus, definitely 'not worthy' that Jesus should enter under his roof. This again was a very remarkable attitude for a Roman official to take up. After all, Jesus at first must have seemed just a wandering peasant teacher without any of the marks of the accredited schools. And this centurion was the all-powerful figure in Capernaum, and everybody knows how power can go to a man's head and cause him to strut and pose. But there was no strutting and posing with this man. The Jews might consider him 'worthy', but he knew himself too well to make such a claim for himself, knew how often he failed in his private life, in his home life, failed in self-control, in courage, in kindness. Hence he could never judge others harshly, never jump to conclusions about them, never impute the worst motives. He felt too miserable a sinner himself. And it was surely just because there was about him that utter humility that his relations with the Jews were so harmonious. For it is true to say that there will never be harmony in a home, in a country, in the world, until all recognize themselves as miserable sinners standing in constant need of God's mercy and grace, and of forgiveness from one another. Admittedly there are degrees of sin, but none of us in the searching light of God's holiness is really 'worthy'. We all constantly, whatever our political or national allegiance, fall very far short. What a difference it

would make, if, at the beginning of every session of the House of Commons, at the beginning of every international conference, all the members should join together in one great act of confession of sin, and of unworthiness to grapple with the problems lying ahead! Would there not be a new spirit in the deliberations—a new humility, a new willingness to understand the other's point of view? Did not the secret of the late King George V's hold over his people lie in his remark to the Archbishop after the wonderfully enthusiastic celebration of his semi-jubilee, 'I never expected it: I'm such an ordinary sort of a fellow.'

'He is worthy,' said the Jews. 'I am not worthy,' said the centurion himself, and therein lay his power of leadership. Such a one could be used, used of God.

Finally, Jesus' view of this man. This is the most important of all. And in this case the verdict of Jesus is one of the most enthusiastic commendations that ever fell from His lips. Jesus, we read, ' marvelled at him '. And the odd thing is that He marvelled at him not on the ground of any of the qualities we have so far mentioned, but on the ground of his ' faith '. ' Jesus turned Him about,' we read, ' and said unto the people that followed Him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.'

What did Jesus mean by the word ' faith '? He didn't mean what some people seem to think is meant, blind acceptance of certain dogmas. No, by ' faith ' Jesus meant this man's confidence in Him, this man's quiet confidence that the very power of God was present in Him, so that He had only to speak the word and the servant would be healed. It was ' faith ' in this sense which Jesus was always looking for in men and, if He found it, there was scarcely any limit to what He could do. But if He didn't find it, His hands seemed to be tied.

And ' faith ' in this sense, in the sense of the firm conviction that life does not just go round in aimless circles, that there



is another world than this, a spiritual world, and that the powers of that world can break into this, take possession of men and women and radically change them, 'faith' in this sense is the indispensable quality. Without it we are beaten as a country, beaten as a church, beaten as individuals. I remember in the darkest days of the war a journalist saying that that side would lose whose heart broke first. And the secret of the heart which does not break is simply 'faith', faith in the God who lives and acts and is on the side of everything that makes for more abundant life.

But you say, 'How can we have such faith in a world like this? So often it seems as though the things we care for most are constantly at the mercy of the things we care for least.' Well, where did the centurion's faith come from? It didn't come from his own record nor the record of his fellows. It came from Jesus. He had heard enough of Jesus, seen enough of Jesus, to be convinced that in Him was the very power of God, and that when He was present miracles could happen.

So when our faith burns low, let us get closer to Jesus. Let us call to mind the mighty works that have been done in His name, the lives that have been changed, the evil things that have been driven out, the communities that have been cleansed. Let us steep our minds in the great hymns about Him, in the biographies of His greatest servants, in the stories of what has happened and still does happen in the mission field. Then will steal on the ear the distant triumph song, and hearts will be brave again, and arms be strong. For through 'faith', men have 'subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens'.

'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.'

## 7

## Set Free

*Thou hast set my feet in a large place.* —Psalm 31<sup>8</sup> (R.V.)

IT WAS while listening to a broadcast by J. B. Priestley on Jung, the great Swiss psychiatrist and writer, that these words of the psalmist seized upon me. Priestley began by saying that what Jung's books had done for him was to 'liberate' him: that is, to lead him out, out into wider spaces with wider horizons and more air to breathe. He had evidently arrived at one of those dead points in life, which we all know, when he had sort of got stuck in his thinking, stuck in his seeing, stuck in his feeling. And then Jung had come along, and almost immediately the obstructing walls had gone down, and Priestley was on the move again, thinking, writing, feeling with a zest and creativeness he had not known for months. In the words of the psalmist, Jung had 'set his feet in a large place'.

And in one of his books, C. S. Lewis writes much in the same vein about the effect George MacDonald and his writings once had upon him. It was one frosty afternoon on Leatherhead station, he tells us, when he first bought a copy of MacDonald's *Phantasies*, and the reading of that book was to him 'what the first sight of Beatrice had been to Dante: *Here begins the New Life*'. It was, he says, as though he had crossed a frontier, as though he had broken out of his normal mode of consciousness and 'possessed joys not promised to our birth'. MacDonald hit him at a level deeper than his thoughts or even his passions, shocked him more fully awake

than ever he had been before. To quote the psalmist again, George MacDonald had 'set his feet in a large place'.

Of course, this is what every great writer or thinker or preacher does for us. We all know what it is to get shut up in some prison of sterility and frustration, when high walls seem to close in upon us and we can't see the sun or feel the wind. Then we read a certain book, hear a certain sermon, have a certain talk, and immediately we are delivered, set free, out on to the open road, out into a large place. Life seems to have taken on a new dimension. 'I went to chapel tonight,' once wrote James Smetham, the artist, 'fretting with plenty of dark and vexing suggestions, all sore as to feeling, and I came away calm, sweet, fresh, all my cares gone, rejoicing in the God of my salvation.'

Now, testifies the writer of this 31st Psalm, that is what religion supremely does do. It releases us from the hand of the enemy of our souls and sets our feet in a large place. It gives us vision and air and space.

Unfortunately, there are many people who think that religion has diametrically the opposite effect. They think that it but further shuts in, further cribs and cabins and confines. And we must admit that some forms of religion do. When George Eliot's *Life* was first published, and the world learnt with what apparent suddenness and ease she had cast off her early religious faith, R. H. Hutton of the *Spectator* observed: 'To me the remarkable point is that George Eliot felt herself relieved of a burden rather than robbed of a great spiritual mainstay by the change.' Evidently the religion of George Eliot's childhood had been of the narrow, shutting-in kind. So was the religion to which Howard Spring in his book of reminiscences, *And Another Thing*, tells us he was first introduced. It drained life of all colour, robbed it of all warmth, made it a drab, cold bleakness.

But a religion which has that effect is certainly not the religion of the New Testament. That religion set men's feet

in a large place. 'I am the door,' said Jesus, 'by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.' 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is,' cries Paul, 'there is liberty.' And again he speaks of 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'. Those men of the New Testament always impress you as men whose feet have been set in a large place, where the winds of God blow healthily. And it has been the same all through the Christian centuries. Just think of the finest religious people you have known or read about. Has there not always been about them what Emerson once called, 'a largeness of suggestion', so that when they are present the very waves of the air seem to be stirred? Up to a point great poetry, great drama, great music, great art can all set our feet in a large place, so that once again we begin to dream dreams and see visions, but, for really effecting this, there is nothing to compare with religion, with a vital experience of God.

How can this claim be justified? Can we say a little more specifically how religion does set men's feet in a large place?

In the first place, we can surely say that religion, by bringing God into a person's life, brings a new hope, a new confidence, a new sense of significance and meaning, changes life from seeming an unimportant little anecdote into a pulsing drama of the soul. During the first world war, a name was coined by French doctors for a disease which made its appearance in prison camps. They called it 'barbed-wire sickness'. Its chief symptom was an appalling sense of the futility and meaninglessness of existence. No matter what camp activities were organized, or with what vigour they were prosecuted, nothing could quite banish from the mind the awareness of the barbed-wire enclosure, the isolation from any task which might have real and lasting significance. So it is with many today. They too are suffering from

‘barbed-wire sickness’, from an appalling sense of the futility and meaninglessness of existence. So we have one of our ultra-modern poets, W. H. Auden, writing in his ultra-modern style:

It wasn’t always like this?  
Perhaps it wasn’t, but it is.  
Put the car away; when life fails,  
What’s the good of going to Wales?  
Here am I, here are you:  
But what does it mean? What are we going to do?

Who of us does not know this mood of wondering what’s the good of going anywhere or doing anything, of wondering what it all means, this same, senseless, silly round.

It is not until God comes into a person’s life that he is finally cured of ‘barbed-wire sickness’. For then his feet are set in a large place. He comes to see life as a sacred trust, to realize that he is here for a purpose—to do God’s will. That will is made plain to him in a general way in the life and teaching of Jesus, in a particular way through guidance in all his own private decisions. After a time he comes to see that as he seeks to find and take the way of God’s commandment, all things, even the untoward things, strangely seem to work together for good. Still more he comes to realize that he is never left alone. Always is there that Other, now leading on, now heading off, now challenging, now comforting. Every part of life, life in the home, life in the office or shop, life in the outside world, becomes shot through with new meaning and significance. He sees it all in the light of God’s purpose for him and his fellows, and he is conscious now of what Whitehead calls ‘some eternal greatness in the passage of time’. In the words of the psalmist, his feet have been set in a large place.

In the second place, we can surely say that religion sets men’s feet in a large place, because it leads them out from a



life of complete preoccupation with themselves, out into a life of caring for others. Many of those who complain that they feel shut-in and unable to breathe have mainly themselves to blame. It is they themselves who have locked the doors and pulled down the blinds. Perhaps they have been hurt rather badly. Someone has let them down, been unfaithful, bitterly disappointed. And they say, 'Very well, no one will get the chance to wound again', and they retire within themselves and wear constantly a protective armour. But they find no real peace that way. Though they won't admit it, at heart they are still desperately unhappy. And they will continue to be, until they get out, out into a life of caring and serving. The Lord turned the captivity of Job—when? When Job prayed for his friends. As long, that is, as Job remained concerned only with Job and his grievances, he found no peace. It was only as he began to think of others and their needs and of how he could help that his night turned into day. So the paradox is true that it is only as we lose our lives, lose them in the service of others, that we truly find them; that if we want to carry our own burden bravely, then try to carry someone else's as well. 'Whenever we dig another out of trouble, the hole we make is the hole in which we bury our own.'

There is a story told of a lovely French Countess who rode forth one morning with a gay company to lead the hunt, and who, an hour later, was brought back, thrown from her horse and crippled for life. At first she bitterly resented her lot, and cursed the cruel fate which could allow of such a thing. But gradually she was persuaded to transform her castle into a home for incurables like herself, and in so doing she found a peace which earlier she would not have believed existed. Her feet were set in a large place, because she had ceased to be obsessed with herself, and had begun to care and help.

Finally, we can say that religion sets men's feet in a large place, because 'Jesus Christ hath abolished death, and hath

brought life and immortality to light through the gospel'. In his broadcast, Priestley said that Jung teaches that up to forty our experiences are in the nature of preparation for life. After forty they are preparation for death. But if death be the end, how futile it would all seem! So it is true to say that if really we are to make sense of life, we must make sense of death. And we make sense of death only as we see it as the opening of a door, the letting in of the dawn, Jesus saying, 'Let us go over to the other side'. And the religious man always sees death like this, for in this world he has known 'the power of an endless life', felt 'through all this fleshly dresse bright shootes of everlastingnesse', and he is quietly persuaded that nothing shall be able to separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. So towards the end of his pilgrimage Whittier could write:

That death seems but a covered way  
Which opens into light,  
Wherein no blinded child can stray  
Beyond the Father's sight.

And so the shadows fall apart,  
And so the west winds play;  
And all the windows of my heart  
I open to the day.

The feet of the religious man have been set in a large place because for him the last enemy, death, has been defeated.

It's what we all want, to have the prison walls broken down and our feet set in a large place. In the last resort it is only God who can do this for us. And He wants to do it. He lives to do it. He came in Jesus to do it. All we have to do is to be humble enough to hand all over to Him, to say, 'I loved to choose and see my path, but now lead Thou me on'; and we shall be led, led into a large place.

## 8

## Turning the other Cheek

*I say unto you, Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. —Matthew 5<sup>39</sup>*

OF ALL the sayings of Jesus, this has probably caused the most discussion. In fact, some like Tolstoy have found in it the key to all His teaching. Others have been so puzzled by it that they have thought that Jesus never meant this piece of advice to apply to things as they are, but rather to that perfect state of society when all men should be Christian and the whole world the Kingdom of God. But this idea won't do, for the obvious reason that in a really Christian society this advice would be quite superfluous. In a truly Christian society men would not go about smiting one another's cheeks. This word of Jesus must apply to this present mixed-up world, where not all men are Christian and where there are insults and slaps and injuries.

Perhaps the best way to get at what Jesus meant in this puzzling saying is to look first at His teaching in general. And one thing that is always important to keep in mind is this. Jesus never taught systematically. He never drew up a clear-cut ethical system. He never formulated a definite code of Christian conduct, so that when you were perplexed as to what you ought to do you could simply look up the New Testament and find the relevant chapter and verse. Jesus never taught like that. Rather He shot out here, there and everywhere, often in the most casual fashion,

short, epigrammatic, sometimes exaggerated sayings, which would startle the mind and conscience, compel you to think and seek for the underlying principle. As a consequence of this, Jesus in His teaching is not always to be taken *literally*. But not to take Him *literally* is not, of course, not to take Him *seriously*. We must always take Him seriously, and try to dig down to the general principle hidden in the particular remark. For instance, in this same section of the Sermon on the Mount in which our text occurs, Jesus says: 'Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.' To take that literally and to act upon it would just lead to chaos and the encouragement of vice and laziness. We must get down to the general principle that saying enshrines, the principle of self-sacrificing generosity. So it is with most of the sayings in the Sermon on the Mount. They are to be taken seriously, but not necessarily literally. As Dr. Denney once put it: 'The Sermon on the Mount was a sermon preached, not an act passed.'

Another general remark I should like to make is this. So often when we discuss this matter of turning the other cheek we fasten on the difficult, the exceptional case, the case of the armed burglar or the confirmed bully. We forget that Jesus was legislating for the ordinary circumstances of life, and, mercifully, armed burglars and confirmed bullies do not form a great part of them. As a matter of fact, He wasn't really thinking of what we should call acts of violence at all. The word 'smite' which He used should more truly be translated 'flick', flick with the palm of the hand, and what in this saying Jesus was concerned with was the Christian's reaction to rudeness, to insult, to bitter speaking, to malicious tale-bearing, the sort of things that do happen along the ordinary course of life.

Having a little cleared the way with these general remarks, let us turn now to the more detailed examination of this saying, and here I think it will be best to work at it in stages.

Jesus begins this particular section of the Sermon on the Mount by quoting the ancient Jewish law, Exodus 21<sup>24</sup> which said: 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.' Which said, that is, that if an enemy gouged out one of your eyes, you had a perfect right to try and get square by gouging out one of his; that if in a fight your opponent knocked out one of your teeth, you had a perfect right to knock out one of his. To us today this all sounds rather primitive and slightly amusing, but we must not forget that when this law was first enacted it marked a very definite step forward in the history of human conduct. For in the very earliest times, it wasn't just an eye for an eye, but as many eyes as possible; not just a tooth for a tooth, but every tooth your enemy had left in his head. This ancient law at least said: 'Always play fair! Let it be just one eye for one eye, one tooth for one tooth.' It at least discouraged unbridled revenge. But Jesus goes much farther than that. He quotes that ancient Jewish law only to continue: 'But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' He is insisting, you see, that all this very human wanting to get square with an enemy, to get even with him, to give as good or as bad as he has given you, all this spirit of revenge and retaliation, all this must go in the Christian life. 'It's natural enough,' He seems to say, 'to want to slog back at the man who has slogged at you, to want to write back as stinging a letter as the one you have received, to want to speak as many home-truths about your opponent as he has felt moved to speak about you. But when you think quietly about it, that way of behaving really gets nowhere. It only doubles the amount of hate and evil there is already. It only arouses the further devil in your adversary, and leaves the breach between you and him still wider. And what is worse, it degrades your own soul, and brings you down to the level of your adversary.'



First of all then, in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is ruling out of the Christian life all revenge, all retaliation, all desire to get square, all wish to give as good as you have got. All this sort of thing, He is insisting, can have no place in a Christian's way of conduct. Rather a Christian, when some one insults him, writes or speaks rudely to him, will humbly ask himself whether there be anything in what his critic says, whether perchance there may not be more than a modicum of truth in his opponent's charges. Like David who, when Shimei began to fling insults at him, and one of his followers asked permission to go and cut off his head, replied: 'Let him alone, and let him curse, it may be the Lord hath bidden him.' So the Christian, when he is insulted, spoken or written rudely to, will not immediately fly up into a passion, but will try to hold on to himself and say, 'Maybe the Lord is speaking to me through this. Maybe there is more of that in me to which my critic takes such strong exception than I care to admit, and I will see to the casting of it out.'

That's the first thing. Jesus in this section of the Sermon on the Mount is forbidding every manifestation of the spirit of mere revenge, mere getting square. But He's doing a great deal more than that. By the words that follow, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you', He is urging that towards our enemies we must take up an attitude not just of non-retaliation for wrong-doing, *but an attitude of positive friendliness*. We must try to act towards our enemies as God acts towards His, try to 'love them into lovable-ness'. Hence when anyone insults us, harms us, persecutes us, we must not only not retaliate, we must do all we can to bring that person to a right state of mind, to turn him from being an enemy into a friend, to bridge the gulf that he has made between us, to sow seeds of understanding where he has sown seeds of strife, to break the vicious

circle of dislike and misrepresentation. As long as there is any discord between us and another we as Christians must be ashamed, and we must be willing, be anxious, to take the first step, any step, that will be likely to heal.

A little time ago, I was speaking at the Annual Meeting of a certain Free Church Council. Many ministers were on the platform, and one lay official in his remarks went out of his way to speak rather sneeringly about them. After the meeting one minister said to the President, 'Did you hear that fellow tonight? We'll have to keep a firm hand on him.' 'No,' replied the President, 'we'll have to try to get closer to him.' It's the only way. It's the Christian way. When another is rude, not to stand off, not to take a firm line, but try to get closer, to break down the barrier of suspicion and misunderstanding by offering your friendship.

There remains one more step to be taken in our study of this passage. Jesus, we have seen, ruled out all spirit of revenge. He also urged that towards our enemies we must take up an attitude of positive friendliness, doing all we can to turn the enemy into a friend, and the way to do this when someone is quite definitely rude and insulting is in nine cases out of ten to turn the other cheek. By your so doing your opponent will feel ashamed, and there will be a chance of your bridging the gulf. I know there is the tenth case, the case of the person with apparently no finer feelings, the person who just goes on hitting. He, of course, must be forcibly restrained, but even with him everything must be done to try to redeem him. I remember in London in the days between the two wars when the Blackshirts were throwing their weight about, and inciting the mob against the Jews, one of these ruffians went up to a cultured Jew in the East End and asked him if he had written a certain newspaper article. The Jew admitted he had, and the Blackshirt immediately struck him. The Jew hit back and thoroughly thrashed him, but he didn't leave the situation there. He

took the battered Blackshirt back to his rooms, tidied him up, and talked quietly to him about the whole world situation. The young Blackshirt departed a considerably changed man. There are people who have to be withstood, sometimes forcibly withstood, but the Christian can never be content to leave the situation at that. He is out to banish all hatred, to turn enemies into friends, and he will do all he can to reach the evil-doer's heart.

Yes, there is the exceptional case, but in nine cases out of ten the best way to deal with rudeness and insult is to do nothing, to turn the other cheek. There is a spark of decency in most people, and your not hitting back, your not shouting back, will waken it up. A minister friend of mine was asked to speak at a Mission to Glasgow University. He duly travelled up from London and gave his address. When the chairman asked if there were any questions, a student rose up and was just insulting. He made a pretence of asking a question, but was chiefly concerned to say that it would have been better if the speaker had remained in the south and had not wasted his own time and the University's time in uttering such feeble nonsense. When the minister got up to reply, he altogether ignored the student's discourtesy, and just sought to answer the little question he had asked. At the close of the meeting the student came up and apologized. 'I thought you would have hit out at me,' he said, 'but when you didn't it just made me feel I'd made a fool of myself, and I want to say I'm sorry.' 'Turning the other cheek.' In nine cases out of ten it works. And always remember it isn't the man who strikes the first blow who starts a fight: it's rather the man who takes up the challenge of the first blow and strikes back. And if he refuses to strike back, again and again the attacker is ashamed.

So Jesus acted. 'When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not.' The Cross is the Sermon on the Mount in action. As we watch Him

there turning the other cheek, we feel, as William Temple used to say, 'we cannot go on forever wounding One who bears the blows like that'.

## 9

### Managing our Moods

'SOMETIMES I'm up, sometimes I'm down, Oh, yes, Lord!' So says the old negro spiritual. And similarly in his *Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis writes about what he calls 'the law of undulation'. By which he means that our life's surface is not plain and flat like the desert, but that it undulates like the sea, goes up and goes down, has its peaks and its troughs, its hills and its valleys; that sometimes we feel right on top of things, at other times buried deep down beneath them, 'all heavy, broody and raw'. This law, he points out, holds in the matter of our daily work. For days we are keenly interested in it, love it, feel there is no job we would sooner do. And then come days when we simply have to drag ourselves to it, when everything becomes an effort and a strain. It holds in the matter of our affections. Sometimes we enjoy intensely the company of our friends, look forward expectantly to the next meeting. At other times all that we want is to be left alone—everybody seems dull and prosaic. Most seriously of all, it holds in our religious life. We have times when we are utterly sure of God. Our hearts easily burn within us. Everything conspires to remind us of Him. We delight in the Bible, in the praise and worship of the Church. At other times God seems completely to have

disappeared, the whole face of things is drab and empty, and we have little appetite for prayer or Bible or Church.

None of us can avoid this law of undulation. It's simply the way we are made. And even the saints have acknowledged it. The psalmist who could cry, 'The Lord is my shepherd', could also ask beseechingly 'Why casteth Thou off my soul? Why hidest Thou Thy face from me?' Elijah, who one day with absolute faith in God could defy the hosts of Baal, the next in desolate reaction could want to die. John Knox who, at liberty to preach, could 'ding the pulpit into blads' in his confident utterance, confessed that in the galleys he had called all God's promises in doubt. And did not even Jesus once cry, 'Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say?' No, there is nothing abnormal about this experience of fluctuating moods. All who have worn our frail, human flesh have known it. We must simply accept the fact that:

'Twixt gleams of joy and clouds of doubt  
Our feelings come and go;  
Our best estate is tossed about  
In ceaseless ebb and flow.

Of course, we must never forget that we ourselves can increase the depth and frequency of these periods of depression. We can harbour some resentment, refuse to forgive some injury, cling to some unworthy habit, and so set in motion an inner conflict which will daily take its toll. Or we can regulate our lives unwisely, take too little exercise, too little fresh air, too little sleep. Or we can drive ourselves too hard, place too big a strain on our nervous energy, act as though we were 'God's tireless servants', forgetting that everybody's role is sometimes that of 'God's tired child'. It is significant that the most depressed entries in Robertson of Brighton's diary were always on a Monday. He was just completely nervously drained after the utter giving of himself in his pulpit on Sunday. Or we can live too much in upon



ourselves. At the end of the book of Job we read, 'The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends'. As long, that is, as Job remained concerned only with Job, his heaviness remained, but when he began to think of others his heaviness departed. So a piece of advice from Keble is worth recalling. 'When you are quite despondent,' he wrote, 'the best way is to go out and do something kind to somebody.'

But order our lives as wisely as we will, we shall still be subject to this law of undulation, to these constantly changing moods. This, however, is not to say that we must therefore just tamely surrender to these trough periods when they come. A Christian is one who seeks to *manage* every area of life, and his moods must be grappled with as well. Otherwise they will be his undoing. They will come with ever greater frequency and make him almost impossible to live and work with. The peace of many a home has been completely destroyed by the constant moodiness of one of its members. And what is more, it is during these times of flatness and depression that the cruder temptations get their great opportunity. A person is feeling so utterly down-and-out that he's apt to snatch at things like sex and drink which at least promise him a little excitement. For the sake of others, for our own soul's sake, we must seek to manage our moods. But how?

*At least we can try to keep them to ourselves:* not go advertising them, moaning about them to others, and so depressing everyone we meet. 'Never display a wound except to a physician,' said someone. It's a wise piece of advice—a piece of advice on which Robert Louis Stevenson so heroically lived. Chesterton said about him that, ill though he often was, he never allowed even the smell of a medicine-bottle to get into his writings. He gave people the benefit of his faith, never of his doubt. One of the King's Regulations for Officers of the Navy contains these words: 'Every officer is to avoid saying or doing anything which might discourage

the men or render them dissatisfied with their condition or with the service on which they are or may be employed.' It's a regulation which all of us might well try to incorporate into our rule of life—never to air our moods, keep them to ourselves.

But for the more definite managing of our moods, a first piece of advice is this. *Try to control all outward expression of your mood.* Don't allow your face to grow sullen! Don't allow your head to droop! Don't allow your shoulders to sag! Don't allow your feet to drag! And by so sternly taking yourself in hand you will help to dispel your darkness. 'The sovereign path to cheerfulness, if our spontaneous cheerfulness be lost,' wrote William James, 'is to sit up cheerfully, look around cheerfully, to act and speak as though cheerfulness were already there. To feel brave, act as if we were brave; use all your will to that end, and courage will very likely replace fear. To wrestle with a bad feeling only pins our attention on it, whereas if we act as if from some better feeling, the bad feeling soon folds its tent like an Arab and as silently steals away.' So Keats once confessed in a letter: 'Whenever I find myself growing vapourish, I rouse myself, wash, put on a clean shirt, brush my hair and my clothes, tie my shoe-strings neatly, and, in fact, adonize as if I were going out. Then, all clean and comfortable, I sit down to write.' And I remember reading about a boy in the States representing his school in a public-speaking contest. Naturally, he desperately wanted to win, but the first prize went to a rival. Broken-hearted he was trying to creep away from the hall unnoticed, when one of the older masters noticed him and followed him. 'Son!' he said, 'I want to see you smile.' And the boy forced a smile. 'Son!' he went on, 'I want to see your shoulders back.' And the boy squared his shoulders. 'Son! chin up,' he continued. And when the boy's chin went up, he said, 'There, that's better, now you can go home.' And we can be sure that though the boy went home

disappointed, he was not now the complete victim of his disappointment. He had controlled the outward expression of it and, as a consequence, the burden was not so great. Certainly one way to manage your bleak moods is to control the outward expression of them, deliberately to act as though they were not.

A second piece of advice in this matter of the managing of our moods is this. *Whether you feel like it or not, keep doggedly on in the line of what you know to be God's purpose for you.* I sometimes think that we don't emphasize nearly enough the amount of sheer dogged slogging there must be in every Christian life. Much of our preaching is apt to give the impression that the Christian life is mostly skipping along the mountain tops with the sun ever shining and the sky ever clear. The real truth is that a great deal of it is just solid, uneventful plodding in the plain. That is the way God has ordained it. Were He constantly to hold our hand and warm our heart, we should go soft—just as an over-coddled child goes soft—never learning to stand on our own feet, never developing in real strength of character. We need these times when God seems to withdraw Himself, when we have to walk by faith and not by sight. These are the times when, if we go doggedly on, faithful to what light we have, we grow most and most delight the heart of God. For, to paraphrase a sentence of C. S. Lewis, there are few things which so delight the heart of God as 'when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do His will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, *and still obeys*'. 'I love one that perseveres in dry duty,' once wrote John Wesley. So too does God.

*And for your encouragement in your dogged slogging on, call memory to your aid.* 'My dear children,' Bunyan once wrote to his people, 'call to mind the former days, and years of ancient times. Have you never a Hill Mizar to remember?

Have you forgot the Close, the Milkhouse, the Stable, the Barn, and the like, when God did first visit your souls? Remember also the word upon which the Lord hath caused you to hope. If you are down in despair, if you think God fights against you, or if heaven is hid from your eyes—then remember.' Yes, remember. Remember that moment when first He laid His hand upon you and marked you for His own. Remember that Church Service, that Conference, that talk, when deep called unto deep and you could hardly rise from your knees. Remember the great figures of the Bible and the Church and their work and witness. Above all, remember Jesus, who, though all men forsook Him and only a Cross on which to die was left, nevertheless swerved not one inch from God's appointed plan.

*Yes, and whether you feel like it or not, keep doggedly on not only in the path of duty, but also in the path of prayer.* When the dark mood is upon you, *make* yourself fall to your knees, *make* yourself go to Church, *make* yourself pray, even if it be just trying to pray over the written prayer of another. God, remember, *is* there, even though we may not feel Him to be there. It was a wise remark which Lady Blanche Balfour once made to a friend who confessed that, because of his doubts, he had given up the practice of prayer. 'That is a mistake,' she said. 'Keep the frame, and the picture will grow into it again.' Yes, keep up the form of prayer. *Say*, 'Father,' even though you don't feel any Father to be there. In that Father's own time the light will break and the darkness disappear.

Let me no more my comfort draw  
From my frail hold of Thee,  
In this alone rejoice with awe—  
Thy mighty grasp of me.

Let Dr. Alexander Whyte sum it all up. 'Many a time,' he once wrote, 'I feel so cold and dead that I might doubt if

I had ever come to Him at all; *but I go about my work notwithstanding, looking in His direction*, and my heart fills by and by with His love to me. It was many years before I was aware that I was over the boundary line, so it may be with you. It is very simple—keep looking; He will take care of the seeing.'

## IO

### The Terrific Benefactor

*'Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God.'*

—Romans II <sup>22</sup>

**T**HE GOODNESS and the severity of God! A strange pair of qualities! Almost at a first reading seeming to cancel each other out!

The severity of God—we don't speak much about this side of God nowadays. In fact, in a very general kind of way, we might say that one big difference between an old-time preacher and a preacher of today is that the former sought to win men to God by picturing His severity to those who did not respond, whereas the latter seeks to win them by picturing His goodness to those who do respond. We of today have reacted rather violently against what seems to us the old-time excessive emphasis on God as our Judge. It seems to have made God just a monstrous heavenly detective anxious only to catch poor frail mortals out, made Him distinctly unlovable. God, we insist, is like Jesus. This is what is meant when we claim Jesus was divine. By such a claim we are not so much making a statement about Jesus,



as about divinity, about the very nature of God Himself. We are asserting that God has the ways of Jesus, the purpose of Jesus, the very heart of Jesus and that, as Jesus was so obviously human and homely and interested in all men's varied activities, so also is God equally human and homely and interested. All the emphasis of recent years has been on the Jesus-likeness of God, on His love and His goodness.

But one cannot help wondering sometimes if the reaction against the old-time stress on the severity of God has not gone a little too far, so that we of today have rather sentimentalized God, grandmothered Him, rather turned Him into a coddling old nanny only anxious to keep her children out of all harm's way, 'a senile benevolence who likes to see the young people enjoying themselves'. And the consequence is that people have come to take the fact of sin far too lightly — 'God is not censorious when His children have their fling.' And also that they have not been provided with that philosophy of life, that view of God which enables a man to face unshaken the dark and tragic things. Why was it that so many people's faith went to pieces under the impact of war? Was it not because their idea of God and of the way He has ordered life was far too soft and sentimental? In the darkest days of the war, I remember a very sweet old person saying to me that she could not understand how 'our dear heavenly Father could allow such things'. Her trouble was surely that through a rather soft, protected life she had come unduly to sentimentalize God. She ought to have known that for a world like this the description of God as just 'our dear heavenly Father' is not big enough, not austere enough. The picture simply does not fit the terrific frame. And there was Dick Sheppard, after the tragedy of the breakdown of his home-life, rushing off, a broken man, to Harrogate, and when found by his friend and subsequent biographer, Ellis Roberts, asking, 'What is there left to preach?' 'You will preach the truth, Dick,' said Roberts.

‘ I wonder ! ’ replied Sheppard. ‘ You don’t think that truth and love are the same ? I suppose it depends on what one means by love. ’ It does depend on what one means by love. And perhaps the trouble with Dick Sheppard was—and it’s the trouble with many people’s religion—that he had rather sentimentalized the word love as applied to God, forgotten its austere demands.

So as one whose task it is to ‘ declare *all* the counsel of God ’, I do want in this sermon to stress the fact that there is a severity in God, that this severity does not contradict His goodness but is rather part and parcel of it, that this severity does not contradict His revelation of Himself in Jesus.

Perhaps it might be as well to start with this last point, that the insistence on there being a severe side to God’s dealings with us does not conflict with His revelation of Himself in Jesus. It has constantly been said in recent years that if we would know what God is like then we must go and look at Jesus. And it is true. But we must take care to look at *all* of Jesus and not just part of Him. And this is just what many of us have refused to do. We have concentrated far too exclusively on the more gracious, more winsome sides of Jesus: on the fact that He was called ‘ the friend of publicans and sinners ’, that He did not condemn the woman taken in adultery, that He cried, ‘ Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ’. We seem to have forgotten that there was another side to Jesus. That He could look round on people with anger; that He could cry, ‘ Woe unto you ! Woe unto you ! ’; that He could speak about shut gates and fires that do not go out; that He could say ‘ If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. ’ Is not Dr. Raven right when he says, ‘ There is that in Jesus which would horrify the pacifist and the humanitarian. He

is the lover of men and their Physician; but at need, and for love's sake, He will use the knife'?

There was the gentle, gracious side to Jesus, the side that delighted in little children and the lilies of the field. But there was also another side, a frightening side, an austere side, a severe side, a side before which men fell to the ground.

And when you turn from Jesus to the world at large you see the same truth of the severity of God confronting you. 'How the world is managed or why it was created I cannot tell,' writes A. E. Taylor, 'but it is no featherbed for the repose of sluggards.' Or here is Emerson: 'Nature is no sentimentalist. She does not cosset or pamper us. Providence has a wild, rough, incalculable way to its end, and it is of no use to try to whitewash its huge, mixed instrumentalities, or to dress up that terrific benefactor in the clean shirt and white neck-cloth of a student in divinity.' That terrific benefactor! How true these words ring when we think of the long, hard travail of the earth and the creatures on it until man finally appeared! And when man did appear, think of his desperate struggle for survival and mastery. No voice out of heaven ever warned him as to what plants on this mysterious earth were poisonous, or what reptiles venomous. No voice out of heaven ever instructed him how to cultivate the ground, bridge the rivers, build his ships and aircraft. No voice out of heaven ever told him it was better to dwell in communities than in solitary families. No, he has been left to learn all these things for himself, through harsh and bitter experience.

God has certainly never coddled man. And he does not coddle him today. Life is still essentially dangerous and uncertain. There is the constant possibility of accident and sickness and death. The most cursory look at the course of life on this planet cannot surely avoid the truth of the severity of God.

And it is the same when you look at what we call the moral life of man. The Bible and the old-time preachers speak

about 'the wrath of God'. We shrink from such a phrase today. It sounds too dreadful. Yet it stands for a truth deeply embedded in the very structure of this universe: the truth that in this world there is a ceaseless and unrelenting reaction against evil, that in this world there are certain defensive hedges, and that, as the proverb has it, whosoever breaketh one of them down a serpent bites him, that in this world there are certain rules of the game and that if you defy them you must pay the penalty. Certain superficial people have insinuated that all talk about sin and its dire consequences is just a bogey created by the churches. But the deep-seeing ones have always known. Shakespeare knew when he wrote *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Goethe knew when he wrote *Faust*. Victor Hugo knew when he wrote *Les Misérables*. Hawthorne knew when he wrote *The Scarlet Letter*.

What hands are here? ha! they pluck out mine eyes!  
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red.

When Shakespeare made Macbeth utter these terrible words, did he not know the meaning of 'the wrath of God', the unrelenting reaction of this world against evil? Phrases like 'the wrath of God' and 'the judgements of God' stand for facts and experiences which no one who has ever thought or felt deeply would dare to deny.

And when you examine the lives of the saints you find even here evidence of the severity of God. 'God,' once wrote a wise old man, 'is hard upon His saints.' He is. Never for long does He let them be. Always is He leading them to some new attack, always shouldering them with some new burden. Think of some of them: Paul, Francis, Wesley, Booth, Schweitzer—how they have been emptied from vessel to vessel, made to bear contumely, persecution, crosses untold.



Think especially of Jesus, God's own Son, who came only to do His Father's will, and led through the bloody sweat of Gethsemane up a skull-shaped hill. And in a lesser way it is the same with all of us. The more we surrender, the more we are asked to do. The more we learn of Him, the heavier become His demands.

The goodness and the severity of God! We dare not ignore this latter side of Him. The evidence of it is far too abundant. What then are we to make of His goodness, His love? Is He a God with two contrasted methods of working? No, His severity is part of His goodness, His love. It is just because He does so care for us that His dealings with us are often so apparently severe. 'God has paid us,' writes C. S. Lewis, 'the intolerable compliment of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense.' *The intolerable compliment of loving us!* It's a haunting phrase, and a true one. If He didn't love us in this inexorable way, if He were merely sentimental benevolence, then He wouldn't worry so much, He would just try to ensure that we had enough to eat and drink and were superficially happy. But God has a much bigger purpose than that for us, no other purpose than our persistent growth in holiness, in likeness to Himself. And if this growth is to be ensured He will sometimes have to be severe with us, sometimes be compelled to apply the knife, for so easily we can get slack and careless and indulgent. A wise parent knows that if his child is to grow in all that makes for fine and independent character, then that child must be allowed to take risks, make its own decisions even if they are sometimes wrong, learn by the things he personally suffers, have ever-increasing demands and responsibilities laid upon him. Only in that dangerous school will that child grow. If he be constantly sheltered and coddled and protected, he will remain a child all his days. So it is with God's dealings with us. He is our Father, but a Father with a tremendous purpose for each one of us; and to achieve that



purpose His dealings with us will sometimes be severe. But without that severity we should rapidly sink to even lower levels of life.

I can't help feeling that the religion of many of us needs a very definite stiffening. We have allowed it to become too soft, too much—if I won't be misunderstood—the sentimental, 'dear Jesus' kind of thing. Only a religion that realizes there is a severity in God's goodness will be sufficient for these ruthlessly searching days.

## II

### Tired of Responsibility

*I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.* —Luke 15<sup>19</sup>

*I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you my friends; for all things that I have heard of my father I have made known unto you.* —John 15<sup>15</sup>

IT'S NOT difficult to understand the feelings which prompted this cry of the returning prodigal to his much sinned-against father: 'I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.' A few months before, that young fellow had cleared out from home in the full flush of youthful self-confidence. There was nothing he felt that he could not do, no situation that he could not perfectly manage. For long he had been inwardly rebelling against the discipline and restraint of that upland home.

For long he had been fiercely critical of his father's outlook and whole manner of life. He was certain he could run things much better himself, and so one day he bluntly confronts his father with the request, 'Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.' 'Give me,' that is, 'my freedom, and let me go.' And the father, like a wise parent, accedes to the boy's request. He gives him his share of his inheritance and the younger son jauntily sets off for the far country, feeling that at last he is a man and his life is his own.

But, as we know from the story, things did not work out quite so rosily in that far country as that young fellow had imagined. At the first, he probably enjoyed every minute of his new life. But after a time it began to pall. The pleasures of the flesh began to lose their zest. The money began to drain away. And none of his newly-found friends stood by him. Like so many friends picked up in the far country, they were friends only so long as the cash was plentiful. At last he finds himself so reduced that there is nothing for it but to take on the lowest kind of job that it was possible for a Jew to take on, that of a feeder of swine. He'd have plenty of time at night in that swineherd's hut to reflect on his past and his abject failure. What a fool he had proved himself! What a hopeless mess he had made of things! How ever could he have once had such complete confidence in himself? He was a hopeless muddler, and he knew it. He would arise and go and tell his father all that he now felt about himself; tell him that he wasn't the great man that he had once thought himself to be, tell him that there was absolutely no health in him, say to him: 'I don't ask to come back as your son. I don't ask to be treated again as one of the family. I don't ask ever to be consulted with and reasoned with again. I ask only for the status of one of your hired servants, simply blindly to do your bidding, and not to reason why. That's all I'm fit for. On my own

I'm futile. I hand over my life, body, mind, and spirit, unreservedly to you. Make me as one of your hired servants.'

Who of us has not known this mood of the returning prodigal, this mood of utter self-despair, this mood of wishing to have done with all responsibility? We have known it in ourselves. We have seen it in others. But it's a mood fraught with very dangerous possibilities.

It was this mood among the Germans, for instance, which gave Hitler his opportunity. After the first great war, the Germans were left utterly deflated. They seemed completely unable to get on their feet again, and a wave of utter despair swept over the land. Then Hitler appeared with his appeal to the past, his appeal to the future, with his grandiose promises, and his grandiose schemes, and like sheep the German people followed, handing over body, mind and soul to the Dictator. Only by so doing, they felt, could they ever feel safe again. As John Buchan wrote: 'It is when a people loses its self-confidence that it surrenders its soul to a dictator or an oligarchy.' In Walter Lippmann's tremendous metaphor, 'it welcomes manacles to prevent its hands shaking'. So did the Germans. They seemed to welcome the manacles, not because they tethered their hands, but because they prevented their hands from shaking with loss of self-confidence.

It's surely partly this same mood today which is leading many into the Roman Church. There is also, of course, the appeal of that Church's mystery and richness of worship, but with most converts, one can't help feeling, it's the appeal of authority. People feel unable to cope with the multitudinous problems that press upon them today. They have grown tired of trying to think things out for themselves. They come to a moment when they feel themselves no longer capable of it, and they hand themselves over, lock, stock and barrel, to a Church which with a wealth of tradition and splendour claims alone fully to understand.

Alice Meynell, the poetess and essayist, was brought up an Anglican. Later she was received into the Roman Catholic Church, and she gave as the chief reason for her change the fact that she did not feel herself capable of dealing with the complicated moral questions of the day. She felt the wise thing to do was to accept the authority of the Church. So do many feel, feel themselves reduced to utter impotence by trying to think things through for themselves, and in their self-despair they hand it all over to Mother Church.

The same mood has had its effects even within our Reformed Churches. There has been the profound influence of the Continental theologian, Karl Barth. There has been the uprising of what is called Neo-Calvinism. God is all, we are told; man is so corrupted, not only in his will but in his mind as well, that all he must do is to listen, listen to the Word of God speaking through the Scripture. The Bible, as another Continental theologian puts it, is not to be read, but to be preached, and we are just to listen. It all sounds very profound, but I sometimes wonder what it all really means, and I can't help feeling that it's just another instance of putting the manacles on to stop the hands shaking.

This mood of the returning prodigal is pretty widespread today, and it's not difficult to understand why. The times are so unsettled, the scene changes so rapidly, the problems are so insistent, that frail human beings are inclined to tire of it all, and look for some leader, some institution, to whom they can say: 'Just you tell me what to do and think. Make me as one of thy hired servants.'

It's a mood fraught, as we have seen, with all sorts of dangerous possibilities, and it's a mood, I'm convinced, which Jesus definitely discouraged. 'I call you not servants,' He said unto His disciples, 'for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth. But I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known to you.' In other words, He says to His followers: 'I have always

taken you into my confidence, and treated you not as puppets, but as men with minds and reasons of your own.' And that was the way the Jesus of the Gospels invariably did treat people. He never dictated to them. He never said, 'You must believe, because I tell you so'. He never sought to overwhelm their judgements with some tremendous display of His miraculous powers. No, quietly for weeks He lived with those disciples, talked with them, answered patiently their sometimes very childish questions, always appealing only to their insight and instinct for the truth. He wanted all men to take His way, but not blindly, rather knowing what they were doing and why they were doing it. And He never gave much detailed legislation about life in His kingdom. He preferred to enunciate general principles, and then leave men to work out their application for themselves. What about the Sabbath, men wondered. All they got was the general principle: 'The Sabbath was made for man; not man for the Sabbath.' What about the evil-doer, the person who is rude to us? All they got were sayings like: 'Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.' 'All we get from Jesus,' Middleton Murry once wrote, 'is a vision and a gleam: a star which those who come under His spell must follow. He gives us a compass-bearing which we must strive to follow in our human vicissitude: a compass-bearing, but not a map.' Everywhere in the Gospels you find Jesus treating men as men, calling them friends, not hired servants.

The reason surely is obvious. If you treat your fellows as slaves, as hired servants, then slaves, hired servants they will remain. They will lose all initiative, all independence, all courage. And it was just these qualities which Jesus most wanted to call forth in people. It would seem to be true to say that the Jesus of the Gospels would prefer people to come to a decision which was their own decision



even if it were faulty, rather than come to a decision which was right simply because they had been told so. It looks as though He would have agreed with the Liberal dictum: 'Better self-government than good government.' With the 'hired servant', the 'O to be nothing, nothing' mentality He would seem to have little patience. His word was the word of the Lord to Ezekiel: 'Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee.' For a man is a man only as he stands on his feet and takes responsibility. Professor Toynbee sees all history in terms of what he calls 'challenge and response'. A nation, a civilization, is confronted by ever fresh challenges, the challenge of a difficult environment, of a great disaster like an earthquake or a flood, of an invader, of disruptive forces within. It will live so long as it responds to that challenge. Let it lose heart and vision, it will die. Is it not the same with the individual's life? From childhood to the grave life faces us with ever fresh challenges, the challenge of temptation, suffering, disappointment, new circumstances. We live and keep our souls and remain men so long as we respond. Once we lose heart, weary of the struggle, tire of responsibility, ask to be a mere hired servant doing blindly what we are told, we are finished.

Where then does religion come into all this? I can imagine some of you asking. What help and guidance can we expect? An illustration may help. Here is a boy at school in difficulty with a mathematical problem. He appeals to his master. Now that master can do either of two things. He can come down from his desk and simply work the problem out for the boy. But if he does, that boy will not grow, will be no further on in his mathematics. Or he can come down from his desk, sit beside the boy, point out one or two mistakes, and by his interest, by the contagion of his enthusiasm for the subject and for his pupil, so inspire the boy that he will take fresh heart and wrestle through. In that case the boy will have definitely grown.

So it is with our religion. The promise is not that it will automatically solve all problems. If it did, we should remain children all our days. The promise is that it will help us to solve our problems for ourselves, that it will supply the atmosphere, the compass bearings, the inspiration which will help us on to the right road. But we must collaborate.

‘Make me as one of thy hired servants,’ brokenly pleaded the returned prodigal. Had the father done so, the boy would have slowly deteriorated. But the father didn’t do so. He took him back as his son, took him back into his confidence, slowly got him on to his feet again, and the boy grew.

I sometimes feel that religion appeals too much to people’s weakness and not enough to their strength, that the truest comfort often comes from the word of challenge, the word of challenge which releases the hero in the soul. ‘Ye, My sheep, the sheep of My shepherding,’ says Ezekiel, ‘are *men*.’ Not hired servants, but sons. Stand therefore upon thy feet!

## I2

# The Beauty of Holiness

*Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.*

—I Chronicles 16<sup>29</sup>

**W**ORSHIP the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Not, be it noted, in the beauty of vestments! Nor in the beauty of liturgy! Nor in the beauty of ornate ritual! But in the beauty of holiness! It’s not, of course, that these others are of no account at all. They are. It’s our

bounden duty to make our worship of Almighty God as beautiful and seemly as possible. Nothing can be too good for Him. And what is more, beauty has a quite definite effect upon the worshipper, often a quite unconscious effect. Just as Wordsworth wrote of those who live within constant sound of some tumbling stream, 'the beauty born of murmuring sound' shall pass into their faces, so with those whose privilege it is to worship in a very beautiful building, to listen Sunday by Sunday to very beautiful music and prayers, to look at very beautiful windows, the beauty of it all will, almost unbeknown to them, pass into their faces.

Yet the history of the Church proves that the merely beautiful service can be a very perilous thing, can simply be a way of escape, can have very little practical effect on the worshippers' way of life in the world. About a certain church with a beautiful and ornate service a man said to me recently: 'It's just a gathering of the esoteric, and its impact upon the life of the community is nil.' That is why, whenever there has been a genuine revival of religion, there has nearly always been a return to simplicity in worship, to a certain austerity, almost bareness of worship. In the light of the rekindled vision of God, many of the previous accompaniments of worship have seemed superfluities, almost hindrances, and they have been cast out. And that is why I, who love beauty in worship, nevertheless am a little afraid of the excessive concern for it today. Goodness knows, many of our Free Churches could do with beautifying, beautifying of building, beautifying of ritual. But the Church would always seem to be at its healthiest when its eyes are not turned too much inwards upon itself and its services, but rather outwards upon the world and its problems. And certainly the Hebrew prophets seemed to be distinctly afraid of excessive beauty in worship. They felt it far too often drugged the worshippers into a false contentment with themselves and the world, that it lacked the note of stern moral challenge. 'Incense is an

abomination unto me,' cried Isaiah. 'Take away from me the sound of thy songs, and the melody of they viols,' cried Amos, 'and let justice flow down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.' In other words, the constant emphasis of the Bible is that what the Lord God primarily requires in those who worship Him is not beauty of vestment, or beauty of music, or beauty of liturgy, but the beauty of holiness. As Dr. Hensley Henson put it: 'The test of a church is the kind of *conscience* it creates in its members.'

'The beauty of holiness'—it's a lovely phrase; like that opening sentence of the 122nd Psalm: 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.' Lovely and fresh and clean, like a spring morning. Yet today the strange thing is that we don't instinctively associate the words 'beauty' and 'holiness' together. Somehow the word 'holiness' has rather deteriorated in meaning. No healthy school-boy, for instance, would ever want to be thought 'holy'. And when we say, 'he or she is a holy person', it's nearly always implied that he or she is a rather drab, dingy person, even a hypocritical person, a 'Holy Willie'. And yet true holiness of life is still the most beautiful thing in all the world, more beautiful than any masterpiece of art or scene of nature. Nothing can so move us and move us at so deep a level. What then are the marks of real holiness, of that kind of holiness which attracts, not repels; that kind of holiness which shames us and sets us yearning for something finer in ourselves, the kind of holiness of a man like Cassio in Shakespeare's *Othello*, of whom the evil Iago said, 'He hath a daily beauty in his life that makes me ugly'—what are the marks of that kind of holiness which make it a thing of beauty?

To begin with, isn't a truly holy life a thing of beauty and a joy for ever, because of *its essential unforcedness*, its *naturalness*, its *ease and grace*? Why is it we say that so-and-so is a beautiful golfer, a beautiful tennis player, a beautiful

cricketer? Isn't it because that about all their play there is a certain unforcedness, a certain grace and ease, a certain perfect rhythm? Why is it we say that so-and-so is a beautiful reader or singer? Is it not again because of the ease of it all, the naturalness of it all, as unforced as the song of a bird? One is reminded of what Ruskin once said about the works of nature: 'There is the evidence of *ease* about the great works of nature. When we look at them, we do not say, "There is a great effort there," but "There is a great power here".'

It is the same with a truly holy person. There is always an ease about him, an effortlessness, a naturalness, which relaxes all who meet him and somehow lifts the strain. The trouble with so many reputedly 'good' people is that they seem to be all strain, all effort, all grim striving, constantly afraid lest they make some false step, and the consequence is that they fuss, even repel all whom they meet. What is it that's wrong about them? Isn't it that they are thinking far too much about themselves and their own righteousness, and not enough about their Lord and Saviour and His grace and beauty? For true holiness is not something that we laboriously *manufacture* for ourselves. It is rather something that we *catch*, catch from Jesus, catch from continually looking away from ourselves and up to Him. There may be an initial period of struggle and effort, as there is in the learning of a game or the playing of a musical instrument. But that period passes, and then you just play, all ease and rhythm. So about the truly holy person who has made his full surrender, there is always a certain ease, a certain unforcedness, of one who is just walking in the Presence, accepting the good gifts of grace, an ease and a rhythm which is a thing of beauty.

And isn't a truly holy life a thing of beauty because of *its deep humility*? Few things so touch us as humility. The proud, the pushing, the careerists, they repel us. But the humble, the meek, those who think little of themselves and their rights and their dues, they always shame us, yet allure



us. It's why the lives of so many of the saints are such things of beauty; why, for instance, the poetry of Christina Rossetti so touches us. Take this of hers:

Give me the lowest place; not that I dare  
Ask for the lowest place; but Thou hast died  
That I might live and share Thy glory by Thy side.  
Give me the lowest place; or if for me  
That lowest place too high, may one more low,  
Where I may sit and see my God, and love Thee so.'

Or take this story which was recently told me. The young minister of a little Baptist church in Somerset was making the arrangements for the Anniversary Services. He knew one of Bristol's finest singers and he asked her to come over for the Sunday. She consented, and sent him the list of what she proposed to sing. When he looked at it, he quickly realized that his regular organist, an old man who had faithfully served that little cause for over forty years, could not possibly cope with the accompaniments. He felt he must ask another organist who was staying in the village, and he did, and then went and told the old man. He was obviously deeply hurt, but he pulled himself together, and said: 'It really doesn't matter. I didn't intend to be at church that Sunday. A long time ago I had arranged to go and see my daughter at Weston-super-Mare.' The minister knew it wasn't really true, and he was terribly upset. He prayed about what he should do. The next evening the old organist called at his manse. 'It was just sinful pride,' he said, 'my saying I should be away in Weston-super-Mare that Sunday. I shan't go away. I shall stay and blow the organ for the visitor.' And he did. And the man who told me the story, and who was at those Anniversary Services, said that he had hardly seen anything more beautiful than the sight of that white-haired old organist humbly blowing the organ, his organ, on what should have been the greatest day of his year.

Yes, about true humility there is a beauty which makes most of the world's activities look vulgar. And its secret? As a great Anglican scholar put it: 'To be always looking up.' Not looking in at what we are pleased to think are our own merits and dues; not looking out and despising him whom we are pleased to dub an inferior brother. But looking up—up to One in whose sight we are all sinners, to One who for us men and our salvation made Himself of no reputation, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and humbled Himself unto the death of the Cross. 'When I survey the wondrous Cross, I pour contempt on all my pride.'

And lastly, I would say, a truly holy life is a thing of beauty because it is crammed full of love or, to use the lovely New Testament word, which, like holiness, has rather deteriorated in meaning, charity. And how love can make beautiful even the meanest person! I remember once in a London tube sitting opposite a very plain-looking middle-aged woman, shapeless and featureless, and then she took into her arms a little two-year-old girl who had been leaning against her, held her tightly to her, and looked down at her with such eyes of love that her plain face was transfigured and that tube became holy ground. The essence of true holiness is surely love, and love is lovely. The two words are almost synonymous.

Those of us who saw that French film, *Monsieur Vincent*, came out saying to ourselves: 'What a beautiful film!' Yet much of it was hideously ugly, the pestilential slums of medieval Paris, their bestial looking inhabitants, the sickening cry of a madman, the terrible sight of the sweating, almost naked prisoners in the galleys. But through all the film there was shining the light of the love that was in the heart of St. Vincent de Paul, a love that was beyond nature, a love that was of God, a love which could be described by no other word than beautiful.

In the life of B. K. Cunningham of Westcott House, Cambridge, it's told how often one of the men he had trained

for the Anglican ministry would write and say how disappointed he was that so few attended his church services. Invariably Cunningham would write back: 'Don't take it to heart too much. If they won't come to you, you get to them. Go in and out of their houses, really caring for them, carrying with you the love of God which you have found through your prayer and worship, and you'll help to redeem them, for nothing so touches the human heart as the knowledge of being really cared for, of being really loved. It calls out all that is lovely in it.'

The beauty of holiness! We see it all in Jesus. See the grace, the ease, the naturalness of it. See the humility of it. See the love to the uttermost of it. No wonder that the old commentators took the lovely phrases of the Song of Solomon and applied them to Him, calling Him, 'The Rose of Sharon', 'The Lily of the Valleys', 'The Altogether Lovely'. He was and is. And as you and I keep close to Him, there will be the beauty of holiness in our lives, a beauty that will help to cleanse and refresh this tired, jaded world.

## I3

### Managing our Fears

OF COURSE, it needs to be said right at the beginning that there is fear *and* fear. That is to say, there is a fear in life which is perfectly legitimate. In fact, in one sense it is true to say that fear is a God-implanted instinct, meant to serve real and valuable ends and, lacking it, we should constantly step into danger and be killed. Its function

is to warn us of approaching peril, and having so warned us to provide our bodies with mobility and our minds with alertness. A person who hasn't got this healthy fear is to that extent an abnormal person and a positive menace to society. Such fear makes for efficiency and preparedness. Who, for instance, would go for a drive with a motorist who boasted that he didn't know what fear was? Only a foolish person, because such a motorist is asking for trouble and is usually not long in finding it. It is the possession of sane, healthy fear which enables a motorist to drive without risk to himself or others. Who, too, would submit himself to a surgeon who had the reputation of not knowing what fear was? Again only a foolish person, because such a surgeon would be wanting in that sense of the seriousness of the situation which makes for quiet efficiency. In the presence of real risk and potential danger fear is natural and legitimate and ensures a firmer grip.

Yes, there is a fear which is healthy and normal. But it is not of this kind of fear I want to speak now. Rather is it of that fear which is unhealthy and morbid and makes for inefficiency: that fear which is of the mind, of the imagination, which comes of trying to meet a situation before it arrives, which could be better described as 'fearfulness', chronic anxiety and worry. A psychologist has distinguished between these types of fear by saying it is legitimate and natural to *feel* fear, feel it in the presence of actual impending danger, while it is unnatural and positively pernicious to *think* fear, to get frightened over things which are not necessarily going to happen, but which you imagine may happen. But unnatural and pernicious though it be, it is what thousands of people are constantly doing, thinking fear, getting all wrought-up over what they fear may happen.

There are people, for instance, who live in constant fear of illness, of some particular form of illness like cancer. Others live in constant fear of poverty, though poverty is never likely



to knock at their doors. Others are constantly tracked by fear of failure, in their work, in their discipleship. Others fear not so much for themselves, but for what may happen to their loved ones. Others live in constant fear of what people will say or think, and shrink from any new idea or brave stand. Others, like Dr. Johnson, cannot bear any mention of death and will refuse to go near any house of mourning. While others just have a perpetual, nagging fear of they know not what, life itself, each new day, each new venture, each new experience. As H. G. Wells once put it: 'As night goes round the earth, always there are hundreds of thousands of people who should be sleeping, lying awake, fearing a bully, fearing a cruel competition, fearing lest they cannot make good, fearing some illness they cannot comprehend.'

The harbouring of such fears, I need hardly say, does untold harm. It wears us down physically and nervously and prepares the way for serious illness. There's an eerie story about a desert traveller meeting the Plague going to Baghdad. He asked the dreaded figure what he was up to. 'I'm going to Baghdad to kill 5,000 people,' was the reply. Some time later the two met again. 'Look here,' said the traveller, 'the last time we met you told me a lie. You said you were going to kill 5,000 people, but I find you killed 10,000.' 'No,' said the Plague, 'I killed only 5,000; it was Fear killed the rest!' And fear is doing that kind of thing every day, causing nervous breakdowns, preparing the way for serious illness, weakening the whole self by robbing it of sleep and draining it of mental peace and nervous energy.

Of course, some people are more prone to fear and anxiety than are others. Some people have been born with highly strung, ultra-sensitive, ultra-imaginative temperaments. But we should never lie down before our temperaments, making them a constant excuse. Rather should we remember Maude Royden's words: 'Our temperaments may decide our *trials*: they need not decide our *destinies*.' Other people have had



unfortunate upbringings. They had a dominating, bullying parent who constantly sat upon them, sneered at them and robbed them of all self-confidence, leaving them hopelessly timid and shy. Or they may have had a fussing, over-zealous parent, who was constantly fearing *for* them, and they early caught the infection and learnt to fear *for* themselves. Here we parents have an immense responsibility. We must do everything we can to encourage confidence in our children: confidence in themselves, in their fellows, in life. We must never sneer at a child; never express to a child our anxieties for it; never, when it is young, appeal to fear, fear of the dark, of the policeman.

But the real point of this sermon is the management of our fears. How are we going to keep the upper hand over them?

To begin with, I should like to make three very matter-of-fact suggestions. The first is this. It does help to control fear if we make an attempt to control the physical expression of it. We all know what happens when we begin to feel scared, before an interview, an examination, an operation, a public appearance. We begin to tremble, to perspire, to yawn. We should aim at controlling these outward and visible signs. And the way to control them is deliberately to relax: and the way to relax is to sit down in an easy-chair or lie down on a couch and let your limbs completely loosen up, 'go flop'; and the way to begin the process is to smile and breathe quietly and deeply. I know that advice along these lines made all the difference to my state of mind when as a young minister I was waiting to conduct a service; and I was interested in a recent novel to find the author, H. E. Bates, writing of the bomber-pilot hero, 'he had learnt the habit of flying *relaxed*'.

Secondly, when anything is worrying you, if there is anything practical you can do about it, do it immediately. When we are trying to sleep, we all know that if there is a creaking door or a flapping blind we'll never get off until we have got

up and dealt with it. It's the same all through life. In any situation which is worrying us, if there is anything practical we can do, like writing a letter or arranging an interview, let us do it immediately, and in many cases the doing of it will resolve the whole problem.

Thirdly, make it a rule not to try to cross rivers until you actually get to them. 'Fear,' says the Russian proverb, 'has big eyes!' It has. It sees a long way ahead and is apt to magnify what it sees. Remember strength is given for an emergency, not with our anticipation of it, but only with the actual emergency itself. The way through the impeding Red Sea was made plain to the children of Israel not when they were some miles from it, but only when they were on its actual brink. 'One step at a time' should be our motto; 'the habit of not looking round the corner' our aim.

So much for the more circumference considerations. Now for the more central ones. When anything is worrying you and darkening your day, never, as some people advise, try to forget it, never try to put it out of your mind. If you do, you will simply drive it out of the conscious mind into the unconscious, and there it will still work, lowering your efficiency, robbing you of mental and nervous energy. There are people who today we say are suffering from a certain phobia, claustrophobia, acro-phobia—the fears, that is, of shut-up places or high-up places; and the way the psychiatrist deals with these people is to try to bring up out of the unconscious the original incident which first caused the terror and which since has been driven down. And in most cases once the original incident is unearthed and quietly looked at, the whole phobia disappears. So should we try to deal with whatever is frightening us—not try to forget it, but rather to set it in the very centre of our vision, look it full in the face, spread it out bit by bit, trace it back to its origins and so, if we can, change our attitude to it and make a friend of it. A woman psychologist has told how one of the unforgettable horrors of her

childhood was a monster called 'a squidgeon'. It lived on a bookshelf in a very dark little room in her grandmother's house, and was used by her elders to frighten her into good behaviour. It really was only a large orange with some burnt-out matches stuck into it, but she had never seen it made nor was she ever allowed to go up and examine it, and the result was she always thought it might be alive, and she was terrified of it. It was not until she was allowed to go right up to it and examine it that her terror of it disappeared. And often our fear would disappear if only we would look full in the face what is causing it and see it for the impostor which it often is. Take a fear like that of meeting strangers. If only before meeting them we would take that fear out, look it fully in the face, remind ourselves that other people are much like ourselves with the same hesitancy and the same shyness, how foolish and baseless it would seem!

And here is a story which I've always found a real help. A psychologist was called in to a young boy who every night dreamt of a dreadful tiger. Night after night the terrifying vision came, and the boy's nervous system was being shattered. So one evening the psychologist took the boy in his arms, and said: 'See here, my boy, I understand that every night you meet a tiger. Now really he is a nice, friendly tiger, and he wants you to like him. So the next time you meet him, just put out your hand and say, "Hello, old chap!" and you will see.' So the boy crawled into bed and fell into his restless, tossing sleep. But presently he stirred, thrust a small hand from under the bed-clothes, and said softly, 'Hello, old chap!' And immediately his frightened breathing quietened into the restfulness of natural sleep. He had, you see, faced and made friends with his tiger. So should we try to deal with the things that make us afraid, face them, look them full in the face, try to turn them into friends.

But in the last resort we can do this only as we are conscious of another Strength, another Presence other than our own.

In other words, it is only by faith that we shall really manage our fears. But the word 'faith' in this connection needs to be clearly defined. By 'faith' we don't mean the belief that God will invariably get us off, see to it that the thing we dread does not happen: that kind of so-called 'faith' is doomed to disappointment. No, by 'faith' we mean the quiet confidence that whatever comes we cannot drift beyond His love and care, that He will be there to see us through, that the strain will bring the strength. But this kind of faith is not something we can summon just when we feel the need of it, very much as we summon the fire-engine. It must be quietly grown and nurtured by a day-by-day walk with God. Begin then each day with some of the great affirmations of faith: 'God is our refuge and strength,' 'The Lord is my shepherd,' 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee.' Begin each day with these or any other of the great affirmations from the Bible or the hymn-book, say the words over *aloud*, stay your mind on each phrase, then will you be able to face all things unafraid because you know you will not be called upon to face them alone. Then will you be able to say about any of them what Rupert Brooke said about war:

War knows no power. Safe shall be my going,  
Secretly armed against all death's endeavour;  
Safe though all safety's lost; safe where men fall;  
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.

Yes, safe, because safe in the Father's arms.

## I4

## Jesus and the Ordinary Man

*And the common people heard Him gladly.*

—Mark 12 <sup>37</sup>

‘**T**HE COMMON people’: that is, the ordinary people, the rank and file people, the undistinguished people, the people whose names never get into the newspapers, but the people who nevertheless bear the real burden of the work of this world, and without whose faithfulness life as we know it would soon cease to be. ‘The common people’: the house-wives and mothers whose days are one long struggle to keep the house clean, to have the meals ready and get the children off to school; the working men, the salesmen in the shops and markets, the ploughmen in the fields, the shepherds on the hills; the young fellows and girls, eager for life, yet rather afraid of it, looking for some leader to whom they can dedicate their all. People like these, writes Mark, the common people, the rank and file people, they heard Jesus gladly.

Of course, they were not the only ones who heard Him gladly. Jesus made His appeal to the more distinguished and the better educated as well. It’s a great mistake and apt to give a false impression to speak of the first Christians as though they were all simple and unlearned people. Many of them were. But quite a number of them were not. There was Nicodemus, one of the highest placed men of his day; there was Joseph of Arimathaea; there were Mary and Martha, quite obviously comfortably off and refined people; there was



Joanna, the wife of Herod's highest court official; and in the early Church there were many of good position and first-class brains. They too felt His appeal, and confessed to have found in Him the way, the truth and the life.

But what I'm concerned to emphasize now was His appeal to the ordinary man and woman, to the people who have not much time to read and think, to the people immersed in the demanding business of trying to make ends meet and just carrying on from day to day. They heard Him gladly. And it is well they did, for they compose by far the greatest section of the world's population, and a Saviour who is going to be a Saviour of the world must have His message for them. And it is because somehow today we in the churches are missing the common people, failing to appeal to the rank and file of our towns and villages, that I want if I can in this sermon to think out what it was in Jesus which gave Him such an appeal to the ordinary man and woman, which caused the common people to hear Him gladly.

To begin with, I think the common people heard Jesus gladly because He was *so very human*. You ask a non-churchgoer why he never fails to listen to a certain radio preacher, and in nine cases out of ten he'll reply: 'I like that man because he always sounds so human.' And by describing that preacher as human, he means that when he speaks he gives you the feeling that he is a man like yourself, that he feels the same things as you feel, that he knows your temptations, your moods, your fears, that he's not just a preacher, but flesh and blood. That's what I'm convinced the ordinary person, whether he realizes it or not, asks for first of all in us preachers—just humanness. And that's why he listened so gladly to Jesus. He felt that Jesus was so human. He felt that Jesus knew life. He felt that Jesus knew him. He didn't feel like that about most of the other religious teachers of the day. He felt that they might know the law and the prophets, but they didn't know life. And how could they? For the most

part they kept themselves away from the ordinary people. They lived aloof and remote. But Jesus was so different. He moved quite freely among people. He entered into their interests and their festivities. He had laboured for the best part of His life in a carpenter's shop, and had thought out His teaching not in a rabbi's robe, but in a workman's jacket. He was one of themselves, the common people felt, bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh, altogether human.

Of a certain Scottish preacher Henry Drummond once said: 'He is a juiceless creature: you can bear even with an ass if he has juice, but this fellow has no juice.' The pulpit seems to affect some men that way, dries up their juice, and they become sticks, inhuman, and the common people turn away.

In the second place, I feel the common people heard Jesus gladly because *they could understand what He was talking about*. When He spoke to them He didn't seem to be preaching, but just talking, talking about God and life and people in terms of the most ordinary, everyday things; of a sower going forth to sow, of a hen gathering her chicks, of a wild limb of a fellow who rushed off to the far country, of a hard-fisted go-getter who did so well for himself that he had to pull his barns down to build greater, 'of lilies, corn and vines, the sparrow and the raven'. 'What man of you,' He begins, 'What woman of you,' He continues, going right to where people are.

The trouble with many preachers is that they will persist in seeing people not as men and women but as 'books walking'; that they don't or won't realize that most people's difficulties come from living, not from reading, that few can follow for long an abstract argument, that what people live by are pictures, stories, illustrations, that somehow you must make them see. Jesus always remembered this. He probably talked to the Scribes and Pharisees in more theological language, but to the ordinary people He talked in the terms

of ordinary life, and immediately got His point of contact, and they listened.

‘Jesus,’ Pascal once wrote, ‘speaks so simply about the deepest things, you might almost imagine He had never thought about them.’

Thirdly, they listened to Him gladly, because they knew *He practised what He preached*. ‘Nothing sounds so dreadful,’ I once read, ‘as the right phrase on the wrong lips.’ It’s true, and that is why some people can never listen to a certain preacher with any respect. It’s not what he says that is the trouble. It’s what they know him to be—proud, hard, uncharitable, a tyrant in the home. It was not like that with Jesus. His teaching and His life were one piece. When He talked about prayer, they could remember seeing Him going off early in the morning to be alone on the hills. When He talked about having faith in God, they could see how quietly and fearlessly He walked amid all the plottings of His enemies. When He talked about forgiveness, they knew how gently He had dealt with the Magdalene. He not only preached the gospel. He *was* the gospel. It was not only His words that were so unforgettable, it was *He Himself* that was so unforgettable.

What we are speaks louder than what we say, and those who have had most influence with the common people have been those who have lived the gospel to the uttermost among them. The Word, as Dr. George MacLeod so often says, has got to become flesh if it is to have much influence today, got to become our flesh, got to be incarnated in us and the life of the Church. Until it does, our preaching will not get very far.

In the fourth place, the common people heard Him gladly, because, as He spoke to them, *they felt He cared for them*, cared for them with all His heart, and would do anything to help them. They didn’t feel He was just out to add them to His company, or even just to save their souls. They felt He really loved them and was bothered about them. A great French

preacher once said: 'Your influence over a soul is conditioned by the depth of your love for it. In order to save it and bring a divine influence to bear upon it, you must have a divine love for it.' I heard Dick Sheppard preach only once from his pulpit at St. Martin's. What he said was not very remarkable, but the love for people that streamed out from him as he spoke I can never forget. Every man and woman in that congregation felt as Dick spoke that he cared for them, cared desperately, and that he would give every ounce of himself to help. The common people flock to that kind of preacher. Whereas the other . . . well, here is what a reviewer in *Punch* wrote about Bernard Shaw's *Everybody's Political What's What*: 'His words do not reverberate in the reader's mind and heart after the book is done. *He is not moved by Mr. Shaw because Mr. Shaw is not moved by him.* Men to Mr. Shaw are not individuals, but component parts of a machine.'

It's profoundly true that. To be moved by a writer or a preacher you must feel that that writer or preacher is moved by you. People always felt that about Jesus, and they were right. He could not see a crowd without being moved with compassion for it. And when He saw a crowd, He saw the individuals in it, each with his own life story. He thought of people not as blatant sinners, but rather as lost, lost to the true meaning of life, lost to the Father's love and the warmth of home. He cared for people, and people felt it and responded.

Most of all, they heard Him gladly because somehow *as He spoke He seemed to bring God near*. Life became a bigger thing as they listened to Him, deep began to call out unto deep, and when He'd finished you wanted to go away quietly somewhere and say your prayers.

Siegfried Sassoon, in one of his books, says that after talking to Walter de la Mare, the poet, 'One goes away seeing the world for a while *with re-christened eyes*'. And W. J. Brown, speaking about Robert Smillie, the miners' leader,



wrote: 'Smillie impressed me as a man whose life was overshadowed by the Eternal, and whose life was lived under other eyes than those of his fellow men. The values saturating him derived from beyond time and lent to his utterances a quality which was difficult to define, but most potent indeed to feel.'

The effect of Walter de la Mare, the effect of Robert Smillie—that was supremely the effect of Jesus upon people. As he spoke, a new dimension seemed to come into life, the dimension of the eternal; the heavens seemed to open, and people seemed to 'see the king in his beauty, to behold the land that is very far off'.

In the last resort, that is what people want: a sense of God, a feeling that He lives and reigns out of this low world. Often they seem to live as though unaware of that want: but let Jesus speak to them they soon realize where lies their heart's true home.

## 15

### An Unlikely Conversion in an Unlikely Place

*And Philip arose and went; and, behold, a man of Ethiopia . . .*

—Acts 8<sup>27</sup>

I WANT to try to deal with this whole story of the meeting between Philip, the deacon, and the Ethiopian eunuch; one of the finest stories of conversion recorded in the Acts, and one of the first great triumphs of the Christian Church. And the most useful way of dealing with it would



seem to be to take its three central figures and examine them each in turn.

First then, this man Philip. We really don't know much more about him than what we are told in this eighth chapter. Apart from the note in the sixth chapter that he was one of the seven set apart to attend to the more material administration of the early Church, he is only referred to once elsewhere, and that in the most cursory fashion. But from what this eighth chapter tells us he must have been a man of considerable and very varied parts. For in addition to those talents of administration which make a man a good deacon, he evidently possessed preaching and evangelistic gifts of a very high order. For earlier in this chapter there is described a mission which he had been conducting in Samaria, and conducting with such power that we are told 'the people with one accord gave heed unto the things which he spake'. No mere deacon, evidently, this man, no mere organizer, but a man of vital spiritual power. The ideal servant of the Church, capable, efficient, with a good business head, and at the same time deeply religious with a passionate concern for souls.

Two qualities especially stand out in him in this chapter. There is first of all his unquestioning faith. In the twenty-sixth verse, we read: 'And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.' '*Which is desert,*' those are the significant words. Remember this word of the Lord came to him when he was in the full swing of his missionary campaign in Samaria, when the further success of that campaign would seem to depend upon his continued presence there, when everything seemed to point to the fact that in the meantime at least Samaria was the place for him. How odd, almost foolish that word of the Lord must at first have seemed to Philip! What possible sense could there be in his turning his back upon a place where there was obviously so much yet for him to do, and

going to a place where by its very nature there could be nothing for him to do? But Philip went, almost mad in cold reason though his going must have seemed and, behold, in that unlikely desert place, this influential man of Ethiopia, hungry for the gospel!

It all ought to teach us, shouldn't it, to be very chary of calling in question what to us often seem the very strange moves of God. For what happened to Philip has happened to many others. God has suddenly taken them out of what seemed a most useful and fruitful sphere, and landed them in some bleak, unpromising desert, but in the long run that desert has helped them to an even greater usefulness. There was Paul, in the midst of his preaching activities, flung into prison at Rome. But that prison became a pulpit from which his words have reached right down to us. In it he wrote his epistles to the Philippians, the Ephesians and the Galatians. There was Bunyan in the midst of his witnessing flung into Bedford Gaol. But except for that prison we should never have heard of Bunyan's name, never had one of the world's religious masterpieces, for it was within its walls he wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*. And there's a story about an American Quaker who felt himself moved of the Spirit to go and preach at a certain lumber camp. He went, only to find it deserted, the men had recently moved on. He felt he ought to follow them, but no, the Spirit seemed still to say he must preach there. He did, feeling very foolish, preaching to what seemed emptiness. Some years later he was in England, crossing London Bridge, when a man stopped him and asked him if he remembered the incident, and then went on to tell him that he had been in hiding in that camp, trying to make his way home, that he had heard that sermon delivered to seemingly empty space, that it had struck home, that his life had been changed, and that he was now running a mission in the East End. God often seems to deal with people in a seemingly wasteful fashion when all is going well to lead us

into some desert of disappointment, bereavement, loneliness, where all seems utterly hopeless and futile. Don't make your judgment too early. The witness of so many is that the apparent desert can be so fruitful.

The second outstanding quality in Philip was his undaunted hopefulness. Remember that though he had been engaged in a most successful evangelistic campaign, immediately prior to his leaving Samaria for the south, he had received a very nasty shock. He had discovered, or rather another had discovered it for him, that one of his most prominent converts, the sorcerer Simon, was a complete fraud. At the first, that same Simon had looked like being one of the chief opponents of the gospel. But no, with the rest of the town, he too had professed belief and had been baptized, and it doesn't take much imagination to realize the joy there must have been in Philip's heart as he did baptize him. It would seem to him at that moment that there was no limit to the power of Christ, no opponent so formidable as not to be won. But then Peter had arrived at Samaria, had met with this same Simon, and had quickly seen through him, seen that he was an impostor, that he was out simply to use this new religion for his own ends, and Peter wasted no time in exposing him for the complete fraud that he was. Poor Philip, it must have given him a nasty jolt, must have rather shaken his faith, and after this experience he might have been forgiven if he had approached the Ethiopian eunuch a few days later with considerable suspicion and little expectancy. But he didn't. He didn't allow this one casualty to daunt his hope. He didn't argue that because one man had been proved a hypocrite, therefore all men are hypocrites. He knew that for one Simon in Samaria there were scores of other perfectly genuine Christians. And he went forward to his new encounter still confident that Christ could save.

And therein he's an example to many of us. People get so easily discouraged in Christian work, so easily put off. They

hear of a certain minister's lapse or of a certain office-bearer's rather sharp business practices, and they say they are finished with the whole thing. I wouldn't deny that the discovery of some hypocrite does jolt and leave a very nasty taste in the mouth. But it's absurd to forget all the others who are not hypocrites, who are radiant examples of their faith. It's just like judging a bank by the record of its one defaulting cashier, or a bicycle by the number of those who fall off it learning to ride. Philip didn't react like that. He went on, still hopeful, still expectant.

Now for the second figure in this story—he who suddenly appears in this desert place and appears in great magnificence, seated in a chariot, preceded by outriders, and followed by a considerable retinue. He was a man of wealthy Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen and had charge of all her treasure. And from what we have heard of ancient Eastern officials, one who had charge of the royal treasure usually saw to it that a fair percentage went his way. In other words, this grand figure in the grand chariot was not the sort of person who looked likely game for the Christian evangelist. He was the sort of person whom you and I would have been inclined to leave severely alone as being quite hopeless, just utterly worldly and careless, completely uninterested in religion and all for which it stands. But we should have been quite mistaken. For this Ethiopian, in spite of his apparent worldliness, had been up to Jerusalem for one purpose, and that to enquire further into the Jewish religion, and as he sat in his chariot he was actually reading from the Old Testament.

So often do appearances deceive us as to the real person underneath. So often do you and I assume some person not to be interested in religion when all the time deep down they are yearning to talk about it. I remember a minister telling how a young fellow had come round to his manse to say goodbye before he left to begin his medical studies. The



minister chatted to him about his school and life in a university and then let him go. A few months later that young fellow was completely changed at an Oxford Group House Party. He wrote to the minister to tell him the news, and somewhat shyly added: 'You know I think I was ready for this when I called that night at your house. I really was hoping you would say something about the deepest things.' But the minister, you see, assumed he was not interested. So very often do you and I. We allow ourselves to be taken in by a flippant manner, a care-free pose, an apparently complete immersion in the things of the moment, when all the time there is a hunger for something deeper.

A man who had let himself in for addressing a meeting of Theosophists said distractedly to Dr. Stanley Jones: 'How on earth would *you* address a meeting of Theosophists?' And Stanley Jones replied: 'I never address Theosophists: I always address men and women.' In other words, he was saying that he never bothered much about people's outward labels, but made straight for the human heart, which is the same whether it beats in the breast of a theosophist, a scientist or a communist.

Never forget that. Like that Ethiopian eunuch, a man or a woman may not look as though they were interested much in religion. But outward appearances can so often belie. It's the same heart underneath, that heart with its fears, its loneliness, its frustrations, its wonder if life really means anything, its frailty and sin. And that heart can only be finally satisfied by the gospel. Never be afraid to tell another what in the mercy of God you have found. Evangelism, said someone, is largely a case of one poor beggar telling another poor beggar where to find bread.

So we come to the third figure in the story, to Him who seems to loom all the time in the background, to Him whose spirit seems to have brought the other two together. We come to Jesus. 'Philip opened his mouth,' we read, 'and



preached unto him Jesus.' And that should be always the preacher's message. The chief function of the preacher, Robertson of Brighton used to say, is to point men to Jesus and then to get out of the way.

We would dearly like to know how Philip preached unto him Jesus. We would dearly like to have the notes of that sermon preached to a congregation of one and with a chariot for a pulpit. Our great problem today is how to preach Jesus to those who have none of the background to which we are accustomed. Schweitzer says that in preaching Jesus to his Africans he always begins by trying to waken in their hearts the longing for peace with God. 'When I speak of the difference between the heart that knows no peace and the heart that is full of peace,' he writes, 'the most savage of my savages knows what I mean. And when I describe Jesus as He who brings peace with God into the hearts of men and women, they understand Him.'

Philip did not begin exactly like that, but he really began in the same way. Schweitzer tries to begin with where people are. And so did Philip. He asked the Ethiopian what he was reading, and when he discovered it was the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah he began there. It's the only way to begin to preach Jesus: to begin where people are, not where we think they are or ought to be, and then to lead on. And one of the reasons for the comparative failure of much preaching today is that it is not addressed to people's actual situation and so fails to make contact.

First, then, in all our trying to preach Jesus we must take pains to discover where people actually are, what exactly is troubling them; and it isn't always some sin, it may be some doubt, some fear, some inner emptiness, some inability to find much sense in anything—and having found it to go on from there. For ultimately it is only Jesus who can fully satisfy. He was made for the human soul, and the human soul for Him.

## 16

## The Question of Questions

*What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?*

—Matthew 27<sup>22</sup>

THIS WOULD seem the right kind of text for the Sunday following Christmas. We have just celebrated the coming into this world of Jesus which is called Christ. It was no fleeting visit. Having come, He came to stay. Men tried to get rid of Him. They did Him to death on a cruel Cross. But He returned with power: to divide time in two, to confront the Roman Empire with His challenge, to face us men and women of today. For, try as men will, they have never quite been able to banish Him. He has found the way out of every grave in which they have sought to bury Him, and laid siege to the human heart in every generation.

I see His blood upon the rose  
And in the stars the glory of His eyes,  
His body gleams amid eternal snows,  
His tears fall from the skies.

All pathways by His feet are worn,  
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea,  
His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn,  
His Cross is every tree.<sup>1</sup>

What then will you do with Jesus which is called Christ? It is the crucial question of every hour. He alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Well, what do men do with Him?

<sup>1</sup> Joseph M. Plunkett.

Some *are content just to worship Him*. They put Him on a pedestal, build gorgeous churches about Him, chant liturgies, recite creeds and burn incense before Him, abase themselves and adore. And it is natural enough. For He is King of kings and Lord of lords, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, by whom all things are made. But the chequered history of the Church has only too tragically shown how it is possible to worship Him, to repeat all the right phrases about Him, without it making much radical difference to people's lives in the world and their relationships with others. It is what used so forcibly to strike the visitor to Palestine. There were members of the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Syrian Church, all worshipping: worshipping at the place where He was born, at the place where He performed this miracle, at the place where He was crucified, but constantly brawling with each other, doing daily violence to the very essence of His spirit. But that kind of thing has happened everywhere, and still does happen. As Professor Rauschenbusch once put it: 'Religion has always spent a large proportion of its force on doings that were apart from the real business of life: on sacrificing, on endless prayers, on travelling to Mecca, Jerusalem, or Rome, on kissing sacred stones, bathing in sacred rivers, climbing sacred stairs, and a thousand things that had at best only an indirect bearing on the practical social relations between men and their fellows.' Hence the truly prophetic souls in every age have always been afraid of too rich and ornate a form of worship. They have been afraid lest it should act as a kind of drug, shutting men's eyes to the real business of religion, the getting of God's will done in our own lives and the life of the world. So in our day, Dr. George Macleod of the Iona Community has written more than once: 'Jesus Christ was crucified not between two candlesticks on an ornate altar, but between two thieves on a blood-soaked hill.' In other words, it is not worshipping

at the foot of the Cross that makes a man a Christian, but trying to carry that Cross right into the heart of the world's mess.

And it is very significant that Jesus Himself never asked people to worship Him. Rather He asked them to *follow* Him, to follow Him in His life of love, of humility, of self-forgetting service of others. 'Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.' And to the woman who had got all emotionally worked-up and cried, 'Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the breasts which thou didst suck,' Jesus retorted with passion, 'Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.'

Yes, it is only too possible to cry ecstatically, 'O come, let us adore Him', to throng to midnight masses and what not, and at the same time to be just as snobbish, just as cantankerous, just as proud, just as difficult to live with, as ever.

'The test of a church,' once wrote Dr. Hensley Henson, 'is the kind of *conscience* it creates in its members.' Not, notice, the kind of worship or even the kind of creed, but the kind of conscience. That is, the reality of the following, the amount of the cross-bearing, the measure of the spirit of Christ.

Some are content to worship. *Others are content to keep their distance, and admire.* These are the people who say what a beautiful life He lived, what beautiful things He taught, the only hope of the world is for us all to take His way—who say all these things, and do absolutely nothing about it.

We all know these people, these patronizers of Jesus Christ, for that is what they really are. The man in the railway carriage who bemoans the state of the country and insists that what the country most needs is a revival of Christianity, but who confesses when you bluntly ask him that he's doing nothing about it, that he hasn't been to church for years. The man at the open-air meeting who complains that the Church is so un-Christlike but who never seems to see that he is un-Christlike

too and just as much in need of radical change. We all know these people, people who will talk endlessly and say to the conscientious parson, 'Good luck, old man! You're on the right track,' but who never lift a finger to help. The land is simply full of these well-wishers to the Christian Church, people who would be horrified if the Church were to disappear, but for all that they do it could easily disappear tomorrow.

Nicodemus, when he first appears in the gospel pages, belonged to this class. You hear the familiar accent in his opening words to Jesus: 'Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.' It is all so patronizing, so nicely spoken from a safe seat on the fence. And Jesus has no patience with it. 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee,' He replies to Nicodemus with His eyes boring into his responsibility-avoiding heart, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' In other words, Jesus is saying, 'In the kingdom of God there is no place for the sitter on the fence, for the mere admirer, for the mere encourager on the touch-line. All have got to be in the struggle. All must take their share of the pains and the sweat.'

In 1830, Benjamin Constant, the French philosopher, received a message from his friends in Paris who were overthrowing the Bourbons: 'A terrible game is being played here; our heads are in danger; come and add yours.'

In this world a terrible game is always being played between light and darkness, between good and evil, between Christ and anti-Christ. A true man's place is not in the stand merely criticizing or cheering the players, but on the field battling towards the goal.

Others in response to the question as to what they are going to do with Jesus which is called Christ complain that for the life of them *they cannot make up their minds*. Those who should know, they go on, seem to say such different



things. There is Bishop Barnes, for instance, who so ruthlessly applies the scissors to the gospel records, while there are Dorothy Sayers and C. S. Lewis who seem to swallow those records whole. What is an ordinary man to believe?

The answer is, no one knows what to believe until he makes an attempt to follow. This is true all through life. You cannot understand a great composer or writer until you submit yourself humbly and quite deliberately to his influence and work. You cannot understand the deeper reaches of friendship until you are prepared to make the venture of trusting yourself to your friend. So it is with Jesus. As long as you just discuss Him as a problem, you will get nowhere. You must deliberately submit yourself to His influence, try day by day to take His way. Then, and then only, will you come to understand who He is. 'As one unknown and nameless,' writes Schweitzer in a famous passage, 'He comes to us, just as on the shore of the lake, He approached those men who knew not who He was. His words are the same, "Follow thou Me," and He puts us to the task which He has to carry out in our age. He commands. And to those who obey, be they wise or simple, He will reveal Himself through all that they are privileged to experience in His fellowship of peace and activity, of struggle and suffering, till they come to know as an inexpressible secret who He is.' So Jesus Himself insisted that only He who does the will shall know.

A man says he cannot make up his mind about Jesus. He never will as long as he is content to look at Jesus from an arm-chair. He must get out into the street and try to follow.

And what is more—never forget that the man who says he cannot make up his mind is really making up his life against Jesus. The person in the tram or bus who cannot make up his mind whether or not to get out at a certain stop makes up his life against getting out there. He gets

up, then sits down, then gets up again, but by now the bus or tram is off again, and he is taken with it. In this world a man can avoid making up his mind, but he cannot avoid making up his life, and if that life is not definitely set alongside that of Jesus, then it is against Him.

*Others in response to this crucial question try to compromise.* They will let Christ in a certain way in their lives, but not all the way. They won't let Him in on that doubtful business practice which is bringing in such handsome returns. They won't let Him in on that illicit sex relationship which has got them completely in its grip. They are prepared to go a certain way with Him, but not all the way. One or two areas of their lives are going to be theirs to do what they like with. But there is no peace that way. Divided loyalties lead only to inner chaos. Peace comes only with full surrender, only as every door is flung wide open.

General Booth was once asked the secret of his amazing achievements. He replied that he knew no other reason save the fact that Christ had had all that there was of him.

Ought He not to have all that there is of us? Look again at this Jesus which is called Christ, this Jesus of Bethlehem, of Nazareth, of Galilee, of Calvary; what else can you do with Him but cry:

O Thou best gift from heaven, Thou who Thyself hast given,

For Thou hast died.

This hast Thou done for me. What have I done for Thee,  
Thou Crucified?

I long to serve Thee more. Reveal an open door,  
Saviour to me.

Then counting all but loss, I'll glory in Thy Cross,  
And follow Thee.

## 17

## Blessed Advice

*And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice. —1 Samuel 25<sup>32, 33</sup>*

**I**T'S A perfect example of ancient story-telling, this story of Nabal and Abigail and David. The chief figures are so clearly cut, the colours are as fresh as the day they were first painted, and the whole atmosphere is all that we associate with Bible lands.

At the time of the story, David was in exile. He had been compelled to flee from his native land by the mad jealousy of his royal master, Saul. He had gathered round him a company of adventure-loving young men, and had set up his headquarters in the wilderness of Paran not far from the farmlands of one Nabal. David's men had never interfered with Nabal's men. Rather as these latter put it: 'David's men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields: they were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep.' David consequently thinks it fair enough at the festive time of the sheep-shearing to ask for some provisions in return for his unpaid-for protection. So he sends along some of his young men with the request. But Nabal will have none of it. 'Who is David?' he boorishly asks. 'And who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take *my* bread, and *my* water, and *my* flesh that I have killed for *my*

shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?' It's the sort of reply that soldiers billeted in a foreign land have not infrequently heard. There they have been a wall to the peasants round about, and when they have asked for anything, it has either been surlily refused or most grudgingly given. David is naturally infuriated by Nabal's reply, and he quickly girds on his sword and orders all his followers to do the same, and off they set to wipe Nabal and his crew from the face of the earth.

But on the way they are stopped, stopped by Abigail, Nabal's wife. She has heard of what has happened, and she comes to plead with David to hold his hand. And as she pleads the hot mood lifts from David, the mad desire for revenge passes, something hard in him goes soft, and he holds his hand and speaks the words of our text: 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me, and blessed be thy advice. You have saved me from passionate sin, from doing something I should ever afterwards regret.'

Yes, and blessed be the Lord, many of us would say, that at a certain crisis in our lives He sent some Abigail to restore our souls. Sometimes that Abigail has been a woman, with all a woman's strength and gentleness and sanity. Sometimes it has been a little child, with all a little child's reminder of innocence and purity. Sometimes it has been something we have casually read or heard. But whatever it was, ever afterwards we have said, 'Blessed be the Lord God who so restrainingly dealt with me. If He had not so spoken to me, I most assuredly would have fallen.'

But what were the words which Abigail spoke to David and so changed his heart? He would not have been in an easy mood to deal with just then. He was smarting under a deep sense of offended pride, he was filled with what he would have called righteous indignation. How did she manage to cool him down? What was the line she took?

First of all, she appealed to his reason, to his common

sense. 'Ah, my Lord,' Dr. Moffatt makes her say, 'pay no heed to that worthless creature Nabal!—he is like his name. "Nabal", "Churl", is his name, and churl is his nature!' You see what she's saying? 'I know Nabal. I've been tied to him now for years. He's a churl by nature, and you've simply got to accept it. It's no good getting all worked-up about him. I used to long ago. But I've given it up. It's simply not worth it. It's wiser quietly to go your way and let him go his.'

And this is the kind of advice we all need sometimes, and, thank goodness, some of us have got wives or husbands who can give it! We are all in danger of allowing ourselves to get unduly worked-up over some person, some happening, that is simply not worth getting worked-up about. These things happen, these persons are—the wise man simply accepts them and lets things be. A scene won't get us anywhere. I know it may sound worldly-wise advice, but this is an imperfect world and imperfect decisions have sometimes to be made. If Nabal refuses to change his ways, he's just got to be accepted as one of the unpleasant facts of life, and we get on as best we can. I remember a woman once telling me of a friend of hers married to a particularly objectionable husband. Hotly I said, 'What that man needs to be told is exactly where he gets off'. 'It can't be done!' she replied, and she knew, for she was married to a Nabalish individual as well. And I remember too getting very annoyed, as a young minister, with a particular individual in the congregation, and, as I thought, justifiably annoyed. I poured out my feelings to an old elder, and got the reply, 'My dear boy, I understand, but remember God has put up with him for years, and you and I have simply got to try to put up with him too!'

There are some people, some of life's orderings, we have simply got to put up with. We can't do anything about them, so it's no use constantly groaning and threatening. Somehow we must just try to weave them as they are into the pattern. So when you are tempted to write that letter, to deliver that



speech, to put in that resignation, do listen first to Abigail. Hear her say, 'Is it worth it? Will it get you any farther on? Aren't you allowing yourself to get unduly worked-up? Try to see things a little more coolly, a little more in proportion. There are always bumps and jolts in life, and always will be. Some people are Nabals, Churls, and are likely to remain so. Well, then, just accept them and don't let them spoil your peace. Just quietly go your way.'

In the second place, Abigail appealed to the future. What she goes on to say to David is something like this: 'At the moment you feel you are doing the only thing that can be done. But will you feel like that after you have done it? Will you feel like it in a few years' time? Above all, will you feel like it when you ascend the throne? Won't you feel better then if there is not the memory of this deed to haunt you, if your hands are not stained with Nabal's blood?' She's appealing to the future, and it's an appeal the wise man should always heed.

For once a sin is done, it is not done with. 'Everybody soon or late,' wrote Robert Louis Stevenson, 'sits down to a banquet of consequences.' They do. To every sin, no matter how thoughtlessly committed, there is always an 'afterwards'. There are the bitter pangs of remorse; the feeling of out-of-tuneness, of being 'not-there', of separation from all that is finest; the inexorable way in which circumstances combine to bring the sin home and the sinner to book. 'Every man who picks up one end of a stick picks up the other. Every man who chooses one end of a road is choosing the other. Every course of behaviour has not only a place where it begins but a place where it comes out.' Wells has a story about a man and woman in London who embarked on an illicit love relationship. They flattered themselves they could keep it secret, drop it if it became too dangerous. But they couldn't. It got out, and they were compelled to leave for abroad. As the train drew out of Victoria, the woman

began to cry. The man leant across and asked what was the matter. All the reply he got was: 'Why? Why have we done this injury to each other? Why?' Why was it? One reason was that they had considered only the present and never thought of the future, never considered where things would certainly lead.

'All good life,' writes Dr. Fosdick, 'depends upon the disciplining of clamorous and importunate desires *in the light of a long look*.' 'In the light of a long look'—how many would have been saved from making shipwreck of their lives if only at the beginning of some forbidden venture they had taken it. All things forsake the soul that forsakes God.

It's the appeal to 'the long look' that Abigail makes to David. 'What will you feel like,' she asks him, 'when you have worked off your rage in indiscriminate slaughter? Just flat and deflated and rather ashamed! And what will you feel like in after years when on the throne of Israel and looked up to by your countrymen? You will be haunted by the memory of this bloody business. Take *a long look*, my lord, and stay your hot hand.'

Finally, Abigail appeals to David's religion. 'Though a man is risen to pursue thee and to seek thy soul,' she pleads, 'yet the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God.'

It's not easy to say what she exactly means by these words, but it's surely something like this: 'Life's a bigger thing, David, than, at the moment with this fit of passion upon you, you think it is. There *are* powers, not ourselves, making for righteousness in the universe. In God's own time, Nabal will get his deserts. Leave vengeance to Him. He alone can truly execute it, for He alone really understands and so alone can justly judge the human heart. You be content to keep your own hands clean and go God's way.' She's really saying what the author of the 37th Psalm, perhaps David himself after this incident, says: 'Fret not thyself because of evil-doers.'

Trust in the Lord and do good ; dwell in the land and follow after faithfulness. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. For evil-doers shall be cut off ; but those that wait upon the Lord they shall inherit the land.'

It's the voice of religion, ' that gentle voice we hear, soft as the breath of even', the voice we hear when we are quiet and relaxed in church, the voice which we hear most clearly at the foot of the Cross. ' Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again ; when He suffered, He threatened not ; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.'

Little wonder then that David said to Abigail: ' Blessed be the Lord God of Israel which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice! Your voice of cool reason, of wise foresight, of quiet faith, has held my hand and saved my soul.'

May we all in our moments of fierce temptation hear a similar voice, and be restrained!

## 18

### Kindness and Loyalty

*Never let kindness and loyalty go, tie them fast round your neck.*

—Proverbs 3<sup>3</sup> (Moffatt).

*Kindness and loyalty atone for sin.*—Proverbs 16<sup>6</sup> (Moffatt).

ANY READER of the earlier chapters of the Book of Proverbs must be struck by the way these common virtues of kindness and loyalty are stressed. Right at the beginning, the wise man pleads with his son: ' Never

let kindness and loyalty go, tie them fast round your neck.' And then you have that daring statement in the sixth verse of the sixteenth chapter: 'Kindness and loyalty atone for sin.'

The Book of Proverbs, as you know, is all through concerned with maxims for the wise and good and satisfying life, with those qualities that make for happiness and harmonious human relationships. And the two qualities it especially singles out are kindness and loyalty.

If you were asked what were the first principles for happy living, what sentiments you would seek most to encourage in your child? Would your answer be in terms of kindness and loyalty?

Kindness, certainly. It is a supreme Christian virtue. Love, charity, forgiveness, forbearance—the New Testament is full of the necessity of these qualities. To think of Jesus is to think of Kindness Incarnate. Paul writes to the Ephesians of 'God's grace in His kindness towards us through Jesus Christ'. And to Titus, he writes that in Jesus 'the kindness and love of God, our Saviour, appeared'.

The kindness of Jesus! How kind He was to the lepers to whom most others were so unkind! How kind He was to the woman taken in adultery, whom the self-righteous Pharisees would have stoned! How kind He was to those mothers whose little children the disciples would have driven away! How kind He was on the very way to Calvary—how kind to the blind beggar, Bartimaeus! Yes, to think of Jesus is to think of Kindness. 'Jesus, Thou art all compassion.'

And if there was one vice He denounced more than any other it was unkindness, every form of cruelty. The Pharisees were condemned chiefly because they were so unkind, unkind in their judgements, unkind in their actions. The elder brother, the rich man, Dives, the Priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan are all condemned because they were fundamentally unkind. To Jesus the one thing needful in our relations with others would seem to be kindness.

And do you not find, as I find as I grow older, that the first test you bring to people is simply this: 'Are they kind?' I find myself judging a book, a novel, or a play by asking whether or not the writer is kind, kind in his writing about people, kind in his very way of looking at them. It is the same with a churchman or a theologian—is his theology kind? Is there a vein of pity, of tenderness running through all that he says or writes? It is not enough for a person just to be clever and amusing. The ultimate question, it seems to me is, is he kind? Arnold Bennett said of Charles Masterman after his death: 'The secret core of his heart was kindly.' Could anything finer be said about any man?

And the kindly heart—how is it kept? Does not its keeping lie in two things? Firstly, in humility; in a constant realization that you yourself often fail and make mistakes, that you too are a sinner in constant need of forgiveness? And secondly, in the ability to put yourself in the other person's place, to sit where he sits, to try to see things through his eyes? It is rather significant that the word 'kindness' and the word 'kin' come from the same root. We would not say some of the things we say, we would not do some of the things we do, if only we reminded ourselves more frequently that we too are frail creatures; if only we paused to ask what will that other person feel if we say or do this. There is always the possibility that life may harden our hearts. If we allow it to do so, we shall find ourselves more and more unhappy, and more and more friendless. So many of those who complain that people fail them have only themselves to blame. They have not been kind.

But, at the same time, we must never forget that kindness is not just sentimentality. What I mean is that there are times when to be kind we have to seem to be hard. It is not necessarily being kind to our child constantly to protect and coddle him. It is certainly not being kind to the drunkard to give him that extra drink. Nor is it always being kind to



the defaulter completely to overlook his offence. Nor to the neurotic just to sympathize and blame his circumstances. *Kindness must always be controlled by concern for a person's highest and deepest good, that is, for his growth in character and Christ-likeness.* So, if a child is to grow, if the sinner is to be redeemed, if the neurotic is to be set on his feet, the hard piece of advice may be the kind piece of advice. To the rich young ruler Jesus' demand to go and sell all that he had, could not have sounded very kind, but it was. It was born out of Jesus' knowledge of his man and concern for his truest development. And, though Jesus did not condemn the woman taken in adultery, He did say, 'Go and *sin* no more'. He did not lightly pass over all her previous way of life.

So it is that often there may seem to be a conflict between the kind way of acting and the wise way of acting. The right decision will be arrived at if rigidly we cast out all thoughts of self, of our own convenience and comfort, and think solely of the other person and of his possibilities in Christ.

'Never let kindness and loyalty go.'

Loyalty! We do not hear so much about loyalty as we do about kindness. What does it mean? It means being faithful: faithful to duty, faithful to love, faithful to vows, faithful to obligations. And when quietly you think of loyalty in those terms, you see that it is really the cement which binds human life together: binds the home together, binds society together, binds the Church together that, without it, all these institutions would fall apart.

Loyalty to Home! Not to go blabbing to the world all that happens there. Not to go putting all the blame on your parents for your own ineffectiveness or moral weakness. Sticking to your parents when they are old. How many old people today would be infinitely happier if only their sons and daughters had remained loyal, had continued to remember them, to visit them, to write to them, to care for them!

Loyalty to Husband or to Wife! How many a home would

never have been broken up with all the tragic consequences for the children, if only at the beginning of some questionable relationship a husband or a wife had reminded themselves that once in the presence of God they had vowed loyalty 'till death do us part'.

Two remarks from William McDougall's so very wise book, *Character and the Conduct of Life* have always remained with me. The first is from the section to husbands. He wrote: 'There are no innocent flirtations for or with married men.' A fundamental loyalty is at stake.

The second is from the section to wives, and he quotes George Eliot: 'She who willingly lifts up the veil of her married life has profaned it from a sanctuary into a vulgar place.' The wife, that is, who gossips with other wives about the intimacies of her married life has tarnished irretrievably the whole relationship of marriage.

Loyalty to Friends! 'A friend,' writes Middleton Murry, 'is a person with whom one feels safe.' And we should feel safe, not only when he is with us, but when he is in other company as well. But there are some people whose company gives us pleasure when they are with us, but of whom we are never quite sure when they are away from us. Never quite sure that they will respect our confidences, never quite sure, in other words, that they will be loyal. A fine thing to be said about any of us that we are 'loyal friends'. A dreadful thing to have said that our loyalty can never quite be trusted.

Loyalty to Church! All of us who are members of the Church once took a vow to make 'diligent use of the means of grace—the Word, Sacraments and Prayer, to seek the peace and welfare of Christ's Body, the Church.' But how lightly many regard that vow! If they feel like it, they support the Church's worship, but if they don't . . . others can carry on. If what they conceive to be their rightful place is not given them in a choir, on a committee, off they go, and 'the welfare of Christ's Body' is apparently never considered.

And the needs of the World Church, the desperate needs in these desperate days, an odd coin seems to satisfy their conscience. If only all those who had once taken the vows of Church membership remained doggedly loyal to those vows, the state of the Church would be transformed tomorrow.

Loyalty! It's a rather old-fashioned virtue. We don't hear so much of it today. We hear much more about self-expression and our right to happiness. Our 'right to happiness'—what a shallow phrase it sounds beside the strong word 'loyalty'! We too often forget that none of us in this world lives to himself alone, that for better or for worse we have to live together, and that without loyalty all the finest human relationships, all the noblest institutions, will simply fall to pieces.

'I have opened my mouth unto the Lord and I cannot go back.' So in the old story in the book of Judges said Jephthah. He had made a vow and could not but be loyal.

'Never let kindness and loyalty go, tie them fast round your neck.'

## 19

### Creators All

*You are God's field to be planted, you are God's house to be built.—1 Corinthians. 3<sup>9</sup> (Moffatt).*

**W**HAT really are you and I? What is the meaning of life and all the varied experiences that come our way? How shall we regard ourselves and the whole venture of living?

We know what some people say. They say we are of no meaning at all; that, as Thomas Hardy once moaned: 'Some vast Imbecility, mighty to build and blend, but impotent to tend, hath framed us in jest and left us to hazardry.' We are of no more meaning, that is, than the leaves which flutter to the ground from autumn trees. We may feel like that about ourselves sometimes, but we can never feel it about those we love, and in our best moments we agree with William James when he wrote that life 'feels like a real fight, as if there was something really wild in the universe which we, with all our idealities and faithfulness, are needed to redeem'.

This is the point of view of the Bible, and few more characteristic expressions of it are there than this sentence of Paul's: 'We are God's field to be planted, God's house to be built.'

To begin with, do notice all the emphasis is on God. 'We are *God's* field, we are *God's* house.' That is always the stress of the Bible. In the beginning of everything, of life, of ourselves, God. Yet some people act and talk as though they were completely their own—self-made, they describe themselves. An absurd statement! We are what we are, and have achieved what we have achieved, because of the faithfulness of countless other people, living and dead. We enjoy what health and strength we have, because of the self-sacrifice of our parents when we were little children. We enjoy what liberties we have, liberty of education, of speech, of worship, because in the past others suffered to obtain them. Self-made! None of us can describe himself as being self-made, as being his own. We are deeply in debt to those before us and to those about us.

And most of all to God. From Him our beings come. From Him the wealth of this universe comes. From Him come the materials for the primary needs of living, for food, for shelter, for clothing. In the first place, our lives are God's.

He has created us. He has sustained us. He has redeemed us. We are His.

But it is the second part of this sentence of Paul I really want to concentrate on. 'We are God's field to be planted, God's house to be built.' It is of *something to be done something with* that Paul speaks. A field all rough and wild and overgrown with weeds and bracken and brambles, to be cleared and ploughed and planted! A plot of land on which are piles of bricks and cement and posts and frames, all waiting to be taken and built into a house! That is how you must regard life, says Paul, as a challenge to plant, a challenge to build, as offering the raw material out of which something fine is to be made. And this is the way to regard life, the only way which seems to fit the facts and bring real peace of mind.

In the first place, it is the way to look at ourselves. What tantalizing mixtures all of us are! We are often told nowadays that it is our business to express ourselves, but which self? We have so many. As H. G. Wells said of his immortal Mr. Polly: 'He was not so much a human being, as a civil war.' And we are all very much like that.

Within my earthly temple there's a crowd:  
There's one of us that's humble, one that's proud;  
There's one that's broken-hearted for his sins,  
There's one who, unrepentant, sits and grins;  
There's one who loves his neighbour as himself,  
There's one who cares for nought but fame and pelf—  
From much corroding care I should be free,  
If once I could determine which is Me.

Yes, to be told to express ourselves does not get us very far. The dictators expressed themselves, and very nasty results there were.

The only satisfactory way to regard ourselves, our various instincts, our various temperaments, is to regard them all as the rough, raw material out of which something splendid is



to be fashioned. The sex instinct is to be taken and controlled and built into a love that is fine and clean and enduring. The power instinct, the desire to get on, to achieve a place, must be taken and consecrated to the service of a better world. We were never meant just to be the victims of our instincts, still less of our temperaments. We all have the power to say yes or to say no. As Maude Royden once said: 'Our temperaments may decide our trials, they need not decide our destinies.' For in Edmund Burke's great phrase: 'It is the prerogative of man to be in a great degree a creature of his own making.' And all our lives through we must keep at this business of making ourselves, of licking ourselves into shape, into the shape of the ideal man revealed in Jesus Christ.

And this image of Paul's also shows us the way to regard that great adventure we call marriage. So many people today seem to marry expecting that the mere act of getting married is in itself a guarantee of perpetual bliss. And when later, difficulties come and temperaments begin to jostle, they cry out that the whole thing is a deception, that marriage is an institution which emancipated people ought to have outgrown. Their trouble is that they look upon married happiness as something which they will automatically find. They forget that, like everything else in life, it is something you have to create.

The only sane way to look upon marriage is along the lines of Paul's image. Marriage is the raw material out of which something has to be built. In that material there will be difficult elements to be overcome, but overcome they can be, if husband and wife look upon their marriage as a great opportunity, an opportunity for building a home which shall be a foreshadowing of the Kingdom of God.

Again, this image of Paul's suggests the right way to approach the sorrows and rebuffs and misfortunes of life. So many people cry out against the justice of God when these things come their way. Or they just try to resign themselves

to them, as their being in some mysterious way for them the will of God. But if, as we believe, the meaning of life is that we are set here not just for our comfort and ease but to grow a soul, to grow in understanding of God and in usefulness to our fellows, then the way to regard our sorrows is again to see them as 'a field to be planted, as a house to be built'; as a challenge to be bravely accepted, and used for the perfecting of ourselves and the helping of our fellows.

A little time ago, I came across these words: 'Upon a day one came to me clothed in dark raiment. With bowed head and veiled face, she stood before me, and I looked upon her and knew her for Pain. For a weary length of time, she stayed, until at last I rose and led her to the altar: then swiftly the dark veil lifted and she stood revealed, and her face was the face of Joy.'

That is the way to deal with our sorrows: to take them, accept them, and lead them to the altar. That is the way all the finest souls have acted, and in their sufferings found peace. When Dr. Barnardo lost his little son by diphtheria at nine years of age, he did not accuse Heaven and rebel, he made a vow that he would 'by God's grace consecrate himself to the task of rescuing all such helpless little ones from the evils of neglect and sin'. He looked upon his suffering, you see, as a challenge to build and to help.

And in this image of Paul's you have the only satisfactory way of looking at the chaotic state of the world today. Why is evil so rampant? Why are there so much strife and unrest? We cannot say. All we can say is that this is a world still in the process of making. It is not the best of all possible worlds. It is just a rough field yet. It is really only in the early stages of its life. Piles of stones and rubble and weeds have yet to be cleared away. And you and I are called to help in the clearing, to try to plough and to plant this rough field with the things that are just and pure and lovely and of good report. We are called by the Creator God to be creators ourselves.

After Paul had left Titus in Crete, Titus wrote to him despairingly, saying that Crete was an appalling place, and its people quite impossible, and Paul replied, 'That is why I left you there—that you should set in order the things that are wanting.'

That is why God has put us amid this twentieth-century chaos, that by His grace we should try to set in order the things that are wanting.

For, as Tennyson wrote in 'In Memoriam':

. . . life is not as idle ore,  
But iron dug from central gloom,  
And heated hot with burning fears,  
And dipt in baths of hissing tears,  
And batter'd with the shocks of doom  
To shape and use.

## 20

### As We Grow Older

*As Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ,  
I beseech thee for my son Onesimus.—Philemon* <sup>9</sup>

IT IS never easy to refuse the request of an old person, especially if that old person be one to whom we feel we owe a great deal—an aged parent, an aged school-teacher, an aged minister. We realize we are deeply in their debt and we should like to do what we can to repay them. And we realize too that they cannot have much longer on

earth, and we should like to make their few remaining years as happy as possible. And what is more, if the aged person be one whom we greatly respect and admire, then we have the feeling that what he asks is the right thing to do. Paul, of course, knew all this, and in this little letter to Philemon he would seem deliberately to trade upon it, trade upon the fact that he is now an old man, and an old man in very difficult circumstances. 'As Paul the aged,' he writes, 'and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ, I beseech thee for my son Onesimus.' Surely, he must have argued to himself Philemon will not be able to resist an appeal like that!

We think of Paul in many roles: Paul the traveller, Paul the missionary, Paul the theologian, Paul the administrator, but we don't often think of him as Paul the aged. Yet for all the harshness of his life, Paul did live to a good old age, and it was an aged man who at last bowed his head to the executioner's sword.

By no means all the world's great men have reached old age. The greatest of them, Paul's Lord and Master and ours, died in his early thirties. Alexander the Great died at thirty-three, Keats at twenty-six, Shelley at thirty, Schubert at thirty-one, Mozart and Raphael at thirty-six. It is one of the constant mysteries of life why some are cut off in their prime while others go on. With some it does seem that young as they were when death came they had spoken their message and been made complete. But not with every one. All we can say is that in life and death we are in His hands, and that come death early or come it late, it is not the end but only the end of the first lesson, not a full stop but only a comma, that we and our loved ones go on, that the gifts and powers which had begun to bud and blossom here will come to their full fruition there.

But Paul, he lived on, so that he could describe himself as 'Paul the aged'. And we are living on, leaving yet another

year behind us. As we grow older, what kind of people are we becoming? It might be worth while to compare ourselves with Paul as he grew older. If we had been able to visit him in his Roman prison, what sort of a man should we have found Paul the aged?

In the first place, I think, we should have found a man strangely content, a man who, as he looked back over his life, had no regrets. 'I am ready to be offered,' he wrote to Timothy, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.' From the point of view of the worldly man, Paul ought to have had many regrets, for he had missed nearly all the things for which most people strive—money, power, position. He might have had those things, for once he had been the most brilliant young rabbi of his day with the ball of worldly success at his feet. But from the time he met with Jesus Christ, he tells us, all these things he had counted as refuse. And instead of being the idol of his countrymen, he had become their most hated foe. Instead of a comfortable home and an assured income, he had lived the life of a homeless wanderer. Instead of receiving recognition and place, he had been despised and rejected, an outcast from all the best circles. Instead of a quiet haven in which to spend his last remaining years, almost completely deserted he was shut up in a bleak prison cell. From the point of view of the worldly, Paul the aged should have been full of regrets. None of the so-called prizes of life had come his way. Yet he had no regrets, was strangely content. Why? Because he had found a cause and a Leader to whom he had been able to give his all and in whose service he had found ever-increasing blessedness.

And this, surely, is the only way of living which gives real satisfaction and brings you to the end without any regrets. It is living for something, for Someone bigger than yourself, for some cause which is lifting the world on to a higher level; it is living creatively, living in such a way as to feel you are



making some positive contribution to the deepest life of mankind.

Her biographer tells us that before her marriage, Madame Chiang Kai-Shek found her life in fashionable Shanghai desperately unsatisfying. Often she would suddenly leave a party, overcome by a sense of the futility of it all. But from the moment she married the Generalissimo all sense of futility disappeared. Now as her husband's helpmeet in the service of the new China she had found a cause to which she could give her all, and finding that cause she found peace.

Yes, the only way to reach old age without any regrets is to feel you have been of use, to feel that in some small way you have helped your fellows and brought Christ's kingdom a little nearer. Are we living like that? As we grow older, are we trying to be of still further use, opening our arms still wider to the world's great need? Or are we growing a little selfish, retiring too much within our own warm, comfortable little shell, concerned only with our own whims and comforts?

In the second place, I think we should have found in Paul the aged a man subtly changed. Admittedly, if a friend of Paul's young manhood had visited him, he would quickly have recognized the Paul he once had known. The same intensity, the same passion, the same flashes of fire would still have been there. But now there was a real difference. Once Paul had been harsh and intolerant, the typical persecutor and inquisitor. Now there was about him a mellowness, a kindness, a tolerance, a patience, a desire to understand that had never been there before. And the cause of the change we all know. For years Paul had companied with Jesus, and he had come to know, as he told the Corinthians, that though a man were the greatest of preachers, able to 'speak with the tongues of men and of angels'; though he possessed the mightiest of intellects, able to 'understand all mysteries'; though he were the most lavish of all philanthropists, 'bestowing all his goods to feed the poor', if he had not love, it profited him nothing.

And as he had companied with Jesus, slowly the love of Jesus had taken possession of his hot, stormy nature and subtly he had been changed.

As you and I grow older, do our friends detect a similar change in us? Those who live with us, do they find us easier to live with? And those who work with us, what do they find? 'There is only one justification for growing old,' writes a modern novelist, 'it is that we grow in charity. The young have so many of the other finer gifts.' Are you and I growing in charity? or are we growing harder, pricklier, more intolerant? Here is the real, New Testament test of the worthwhileness of our Christian profession. Not our orthodoxy, not even our support of religious observances, but just our growth in charity.

'I think you are perfectly lovely,' said a rather effusive English woman to an Indian with whom she had been staying. 'I ought to be,' replied the Indian with a smile, 'I'm seventy-five years old!' Plenty of time for practice, you see! Are we growing lovelier with the years, growing in charity?

And lastly, we should have found in Paul the aged a man still full of faith and hope, still as sure of God and His love as ever he had been. 'I have kept the faith,' he was able to write. He had had a good deal to help him lose it. He had had many disappointments and rebuffs, much to dishearten and depress. But in the beautiful phrase Lowell used of one of his friends: 'He had kept at evening the faith of morn.'

There is something very impressive in the sight of an aged person still quietly keeping the faith. It is always very moving to see a young person professing his faith, but then that young person has not been really tested. But an aged person has been tested, has been through storms, out in deep waters, and, if he is still sure of the mercy of God, you feel there is something very real about the promises of the Bible. You would have felt that in the presence of Paul the aged, for there he was in his prison at Rome blessing the hand that

guided, the heart that planned, and sure that glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land.

Are we as sure? As we grow older and take our share of life's disappointments and sorrows and rebuffs, are we as sure as once we were of God and His power and His love? 'A man should feel age,' wrote Sir Thomas Ovebury, 'not by the weakening of his body, but by the strengthening of his soul.' With the passing of the years, is our soul strengthening? It all depends really on how close we walk. Paul walked very close and so could write: 'For which cause we do not lose heart; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.'

## 21

### A Happy New Year

*Happy art thou, O Israel.*—Deuteronomy 33<sup>29</sup>

**A**LITTLE time ago I read the life of that astonishing man, Edgar Wallace, and towards the end of the book came upon these words: 'Edgar Wallace had been avid for life. He had begun with nothing, and now he had everything that he had consciously demanded. Money, fame, power—they were all his. The only thing which in these last years had somehow failed him was personal happiness.' How unutterably pathetic is that last sentence! Of what use are money, fame, power, if a man is not happy within?

We have been talking a good deal about happiness lately. We have been wishing one another 'A Happy New Year'. And it is a good wish, and a Christian wish. For Jesus meant His followers to be happy, and a happy Christian just by his happiness can do so much for those about him. You remember Stevenson's words: 'There is no duty we so much underrate as the duty of being happy. By being happy, we sow anonymous benefits on the world, which remain unknown to ourselves, or when they are disclosed surprise nobody so much as the benefactor. A happy man or woman is a better thing to find than a five-pound note. He or she is a radiating focus of good will; and their entrance into a room as though another candle had been lighted.'

What then are the sources of personal happiness? What is the recipe for a Happy New Year?

Undoubtedly, one secret of happiness is a clear conscience, an absolutely straight and clean life. It's curious how many people seem to think the reverse is true—think, like the prodigal, that happiness is to be found in some 'far country', in a riot of loose living, in riding roughshod over every convention and moral restraint. But sooner or later that kind of living leads inevitably to utter disillusionment and despair. For men are more than bundles of animal instincts. They are made in the image of God, fashioned to take His way and do His will, and if deliberately they turn from Him, they soon find the inexorable Hound of Heaven upon their track. As Bernard Shaw's Blanco Posnet puts it, in this world 'there's a rotten game, and there's a great game', and when you play the 'rotten game' you get a 'rotten feel'.

So, if you would have a happy new year, first of all make this vow of Job your vow: 'My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.' It shall not reproach me for work shoddily or dishonestly done, for unworthy habits indulged, for moods of bad temper and constant irritability, for grudges kept up, for constant refusals to forgive. Without a clear conscience

there is no possibility of inward happiness. For a time you may think you have drugged that conscience, but at any moment it will wake up again, when you are alone, when you meet a certain person, when you are asleep through your dreams, and as long as it can reproach you, no abiding happiness will be yours.

Another secret of happiness is the faculty of living a day at a time and fully savouring each little joy that comes your way. Of Walt Whitman a friend wrote: 'Whitman had a knack of making ordinary life enjoyable, redeeming it from common-placeness. Instead of making you feel that the present is a kind of squalid necessity to be got over as best may be, in view of something always in the future, he gives you that good sense of *nowness*, that faith that the present is enjoyable, which imparts colour and life to the thousand and one dry details of existence.'

That good sense of *nowness*! But some people are so busy looking ahead and rushing forward to meet tomorrow that they have no sense at all of *nowness*. They never really enjoy their home and family, never really enjoy their friends, never really enjoy a book or a concert, never really enjoy the beauty of the world about them. They are too much on the strain, always looking for happiness round the next corner, in some distant future rather than in today.

'My dear children,' Marie Curie once wrote to her family at the New Year, 'I send you my best wishes for a Happy New Year. That is to say, a year of good health, good humour and good work, a year in which you will have pleasure in living every day, without waiting for the days to be gone before finding charm in them, and without putting all hope of pleasure in the days to come. The older one gets the more one feels that *the present must be enjoyed*; it is a precious gift comparable to a state of grace.'

It is a precious gift, this of enjoying each little delight as it comes. It is a permanent source of happiness. 'Enjoy the



road; the best is lost to those who hurry blindly towards the journey's close.'

A third source of happiness is the feeling that you are being of use, that you are making some real contribution to this world's life. Eric Shipton, the Everest climber, has said that if a mountaineering expedition is to be happy, the first essential is that every man should feel he has an important part to play. Let a man begin to feel that he is superfluous or useless, and immediately he will get disgruntled.

It is the same all through life. Men must get a certain satisfaction in piling up a fortune or achieving position and fame, or they would not so strenuously strive after these things. But it is only a temporary satisfaction. We are not really satisfied deep down, not really happy, unless we feel we are being of use, of use to somebody, of use to some cause, of use to God; unless we feel we are making some contribution, no matter how small, to the highest life of this world. We can easily test out the truth of this by looking round at the people we know. Who are the chronically bored, the chronically disgruntled amongst them? They are the selfish ones, the self-pitying ones, the ones who huddle round their own fires and never give a thought to the world outside. Who are the happy ones? They are the ones who often without much money, without many personal comforts, give themselves to the helping of others and the service of the Church. 'A happy life,' wrote Olive Schreiner, 'consists in a great love and much serving.'

Wherefore, see to it that in this forthcoming year you take up some real piece of service for others; for then, even though the way be sometimes hard, you will feel you are being of use, and to feel of use is to feel the deepest kind of happiness.

One last word. We want to be happy? Then let us make sure that by regular prayer and Bible reading and corporate worship we keep ourselves in the love of God. Only those who are so rooted and grounded have a spring that never fails. So

Alistair Maclean quotes a Highland woman who said: 'I know the secret of happy living. 'Tis ever to sail the seas and ever to keep the heart in port.' Like the late Lord Grey of Fallodon of whom one said, 'Swinging along with the strong tides of life, Grey was always at anchor'.

A man was being operated on for cancer of the tongue. He had been told that after the operation he would never be able to speak again, and he was asked by the surgeon if there was anything he would like to say before the anaesthetic was given. 'Yes,' he replied, and knowing these would be his last intelligible words on earth, he repeated:

E'er since, by faith, I saw the stream  
Thy flowing wounds supply,  
Redeeming love has been my theme  
And shall be till I die.

Then in a nobler, sweeter song  
I'll sing Thy power to save,  
When this poor lisping, stammering tongue  
Lies silent in the grave.

Quietly happy, you see, because resting in the love of God.



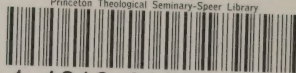
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